はけんのこうき
アルティーナ
ALTINA
the Sword Princess
覇剣の皇姫
アルティーナ
VII
Yukiya Murasaki
むらさきゆきや
ill. himesuz
ファミ通文庫

エルシュタインの英雄
ジェローム
ベルガリア帝国第四軍の
黒騎兵団だった。率いているのは
宝槍《貴婦人の髪（レンヴァイアム）》を構えた
ジェローム・ジャン・ドゥ・
バイルシュミットだ。
《黒騎士》の異名どおり
黒塗りの全身板金鎧を纏い、
黒馬に乗っている。

「初めて
お目にかかる、
帝国の姫君よ」
傭兵王
ギルベルト
「三つ叉の槍（トリデン）……あなたが、
傭兵王ギルベルト・
シュヴァインツェベルクね」

Prologue

Recap

Regis Auric was a soldier who was proficient in neither swordsmanship nor horsemanship, a youth who likes to read. He was exiled to the borders and met the young girl with vermillion hair and crimson eyes, the Fourth Princess Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria— nicknamed Altina. This girl who was ostracized by the court because her mother was a commoner, and was appointed as the commander of a border regiment at the tender age of 14. But Altina didn't lose heart, and was determined to change the Empire that was oppressing its citizens. Hence, she hoped to recruit Regis as her strategist.

"I want to be the Empress, your wisdom is necessary."

Altina challenged the former commander Jerome, a renown hero acknowledged by the troops, and barely emerged victorious. Even though Regis didn't have the confidence, he still promised to be her strategist.

The barbarians based in the northern forest launched a surprise attack under the cover of a blizzard. Regis, who was now the strategist, came up with the the plan that captured the leader of the barbarians, Diethart. Regis negotiated with him as an equal, and in exchange for supplying the barbarians with resources, asked for their support in battles. There was more than enough military strength for Altina to stake a claim to be the Empress.

After gaining the cooperation of the barbarians, the Marie Quatre Army received an unreasonable order from the capital. To seize Fort Volks from Varden Arch Duchy, which was part of the Germanian Federation. That fort was famous for being invulnerable. It was reckless to attack with just the Border Regiment, and was actually a plot by the Second Prince Latrielle to grind Altina's forces away. A direct assault would definitely end in failure. Regis used a stratagem he read in a book in the past to come up with a plan to take the fort.

Fortunately, the plan worked, and the battle to seize Fort Volks worked with some sacrifices. A few days later, they received a letter from the Second Prince Latreille.

“As you know, there would be a founding day festival in April. Marie Quatre Argentina is cordially invited to attend. This is also the wish of our father, I look forward to our family reunion.”

“I will go to the capital, even if only darkness awaits me there.”

Altina returned to the palace. This was the first time Regis visited the scene featured in many novels, and felt both tense and excited.

But he couldn’t enjoy a carefree vacation and the festivities of the founding day.

The strategy of the Second Prince Latreille was to absorb Altina’s camp. At the same time, the First Prince garnered the support of the southern new nobles and expanded his influence.

Altina was 4th in line in the line of succession— She couldn’t become Empress if she wasn't able to win against them.

On a side note, the Third Prince Bastion did not take part in the succession fight, and escaped to High Brittania to study abroad.

Regis was at a disadvantage in the beginning, but he discovered that the First Prince Auguste was actually being impersonated by his sister Felicia, and used this fact to counter the strategy of the Second Prince. He also obtained the help from Eleanor, the leader of the southern new nobles, leveling the playing field.

On the surface, they made it seem like Auguste gave up on his succession rights and supported Altina instead.

And the fact that Altina defeated the First Imperial Army’s ‘Knight of the White Wolves’ made her a strong candidate to be the next Empress.

Imperial Year 851, 23rd April——

Belgaria received the declaration of war from the Kingdom of High Brittania.

At the same time, the neighbouring Varden Arch Duchy also launched

an attack against Fort Volks.

Even though they fended off the attack, Eric was shot by an archer of the mercenary group, ‘Renard Pendu’. Altina’s treasure sword ‘Grand Tonnerre Quatre’ was also damaged.

After this, they passed by Rouen city on their way to engage the High Britannia forces. Regis’ brother-in-law, the blacksmith Enzo, was asked to repair the treasure sword.

Imperial Year 851, 19th May, Battle of Lafressange—

The Imperial 7th Army used the classic tight formation to charge the High Britannian forces, and suffered heavy losses from the enemy's new rifles and cannons. The commander of the 7th army also fell in battle along with many of his soldiers.

“If we can’t win on land, then let’s attack by sea. If the enemy loses their supply ships, they won't be able to resupply.”

The Field Marshal of the Imperial forces, the Second Prince Latreille suffered serious eye injuries because of a surprise attack by the Mercenary King Gilbert. However, he kept his injuries a secret and held a war council with Altina to decide the next course of action.

First, Altina’s Border Regiment and the remnants of the western forces would be reorganized into the Imperial Fourth Army. Next, the strategist Regis was promoted to third grade Admin Officer and bestowed the name of Regis d’Auric.

Accepting Latreille’s orders, Altina headed for the ocean while the First Army stayed to defend the capital,

The ‘Queen’s Fleet’ of the kingdom of High Brittania consisted of the 74 guns Princess Class warships, powered by a steam engine and did not rely on the wind. It was faster, tougher and armed with powerful cannons.

In contrast, the warships of Belgaria were antiquated sail ships.

However, Regis used the information he got from the local fishermen to substantiate the tactics he read from a book. By utilizing various

stratagems, they finally defeated the enemy fleet.

Prologue 1: The Stubborn Blacksmith.

> Imperial Year 851, 25th May—
> Day break.

The blacksmith Enzo rubbed his dry eyes.

The adrenaline rush of finishing a heavy workload, combined with the fatigue from working through the night, made him feel weak.

Sunlight shone in through the window.

His six disciples had already began preparations for the day's work.

As the shop was right beside the main road, he could hear the rattle of carriages and the chatter of pedestrian clearly.

It was almost time for Enzo's shop to open.

This was Rouen city, about half a day journey by foot from the Imperial capital, Versailles. Many craftsmen live in this town: bakers, seamstresses, carpenters, etc.

And of course there were many blacksmiths as well.

All the workshops were located on the western side of the city, and this place gradually became a workshop street.

Normally speaking, it would be better if there was less competition, but there was a reason why they congregated here like this.

Blacksmith was a profession that crafted and fashioned steel. No matter how many brick walls there were, clanking sound could still be heard. If they had to rush a job, the neighbours wouldn't be able to sleep the entire night.

If the neighbours were not in the same line of work, they wouldn't be

able to live there.

And the professionals had different specialties too. Some were skilled in making belt buckles while others were good in rivets or hinges. If they were all located in the vicinity, the workshop could ask each other for help. This meant that work would be easier.

The professionals in the workshop streets were covered by the blacksmith guild.

The Union had two important duties.

First would be qualification.

Most professionals would take in disciples. They might be work assistants, or the inheritors of their skills, or even be treated like their own children or relatives.

Enzo was a master who had six disciples in the past.

Naturally, their goal was to open their own workshop.

In order to strike out on their own, they needed to pass the qualification test of the guild. To prove that they possessed the necessary skills to put "Rouen's blacksmith" on their signboard.

By the way, a recommendation by their own master was needed before one could take the qualification test. Without the recommendation, they couldn’t even attempt it.

There were all sorts of people, and Enzo was fortunate amongst them. He passed the qualification in less than three years.

So far, two of his disciples passed the qualification and set out on their own.

The other four gave up on their goal of becoming a blacksmith, and sought other work back in their home town.

And now, Enzo only had one disciple who had the potential, and he would be ready after enough training.

That disciple was — Lionel.

“Morning Master. It’s about time to open the shop.”

“That’s right.”

Lionel was thin for a blacksmith, and he mentioned that he wanted to be a painter in the past.

And of course, Enzo was also studying art. Creating beautiful designs were one of the tasks of a blacksmith.

I can’t lose to my own disciple, he is really talented. Enzo thought.

“Master, the guild still have not sent the steel plates over today… I heard the High Brittania Army is going to attack here soon, what should we do.”

The guild had another important responsibility, which was the procurement of steel plate.

It was impossible to craft good work without good steel.

The professionals alway talked about the guild controlling the supply of steel plates, so one could not even work as a blacksmith unless they joined the guild.

On the flip side, if the guild was tardy in their procurement of steel, and affected the quality of the blacksmith’s work, the guild would be heavily criticized.

That’s how the relationships was between the two sides.

During this period of war, job requests for weapons and armour kept coming in, so there was a delay in the procurement of steel plates. The market price was very steep too, so the guild had to do all that they could.

Lionel removed the bar lock and used all his strength to open the metal door.

This was ‘Le forgeron d'Enzo Bardot Smith’ (Enzo Bardot Smith Workshop). The words crafted from steel gleamed under the morning light.

Enzo wrapped the giant sword he just finished in a white cloth. It

seemed to be something that shouldn't be shown to customers.

Lionel asked as he swept the floor near the entrance:

"Master, is that finished?"

"Perfectly. I just need to package it nicely. I can't hand it over just like this, it's an important client after all."

"That's true. When Master addressed Her Highness as 'you', it might have angered her."

"Don't talk about that, if it concerns this treasure sword, I will even lecture my wife. It looks like something out of a dream."

"Haha… Ah, welcome."

Lionel stopped sweeping and attended to the customer.

It was a gloomy faced middle aged woman, who was followed by a maid.

She was the wife of a viscount living in the city center.

A customer they received several commissions from in the past. The request form was vague and she was picky when receiving the work, delaying payment by more than a year. Simply put, a difficult customer.

That might be so, but they still had to welcome her with a smile.

Enzo stretched his back lazily and walked up to her.

"Welcome, anything I can help you with?"

"Of course, I won't come here if I have no business with you."

"Please tell me."

"This might be a workshop, but just knowing how to forge steel isn't good enough. You have to learn the skills on how to attend to customers."

"Hah… You are right."

Is she here to lecture me? If that is the case, I will just bear with it and let it go.

The viscountess gestured with her eyes, and the maid took out something from her basket that was covered with a cloth.

“This is…”

Enzo took and opened it, and found sewing scissors inside.

“Ah, they are scissors crafted here in the past.”

“Yes, they handle smoothly, but broke just recently.”

“Hmmm…”

They were sewing scissors he entrusted his disciple to craft, that was half a year ago.

It wouldn’t be strange for a seamstress, but the durability was too poor if they broke after half a year when the wife of a noble family was using them.

He checked the workmanship, and it didn’t seem to be the quality of the scissors.

“The blades are chipped all over… Were they used to cut something other than cloth, such as leather?”

“Who would cut that sort of thing!?”

The viscountess shouted suddenly, and the disciples all looked her way.

“Hmm, is that so… Why would there be so many chips on the blades from just cutting cloth?”

“I wouldn’t cut something like leather! It’s your fault for producing such poor quality scissors! Hurry up and fix them!”

“Well, they were made by us after all, just grinding the blades will do… But our schedule is full today, can you come back a few days later?”

“Don’t joke with me, I need to use them now. That’s why I came here first thing in the morning!”

“Even if you say that, we will still need to work according to when the job request was made.”

“What, they are just requests by the commoners right?”

“No…”

“I am using those scissors for the Viscount House. Instead of commoners, wouldn’t the repair of my scissors take priority?”

I really feel like chasing her out.

A few days ago, he was rude to an arrogant customer and got lectured badly by his wife. If she knew that he rejected the business of a noblewoman, the consequences would be dire.

As he was at a loss on what to do, his disciple Lionel ran over and whispered.

“The client who made that request is here.”

“Hmm?”

He glanced outside and saw a soldier in light armour holding the reins of a warhorse.

The white cape on the shoulders of the soldier bore the insignia of a green land with white shield, the Coat of Arms for Princess Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria.

The soldier entered the workshop after saluting.

From his dry skin, eyes covered with dust and the rough way he dismounted, it was clear where he came from.

His voice was rasped.

“I am a messenger from the battlefield bearing urgent news, may I have a word?”

Enzo glanced at the customer he was attending to.

“If the Viscountess permits.”

Rouen city was near the capital, but the tense atmosphere of war was rarely felt here. The sudden appearance of a soldier returning from the battlefield made her realize that war was very close to her.

“P-Please.”

“Pardon me! Sir Blacksmith, please take this letter.”

Enzo accepted the letter from the soldier, undid the wax seal and read.

The content was simple, and the handwriting seemed to be from his wife’s brother— Regis Auric. According to the latest news he heard, it should be Regis d’Auric.

But signature was that of the commander.

The content of the letter included the situation of the Imperial Fourth Army, and the urgent need for the treasure sword repaired by Enzo.

“Hmm… Seems like I need to deliver it to the Army.”

“There are soldiers to guide the way at the place indicated. Initially, there would be more men to escort, but there wasn’t any cavalry to spare, and infantry are too slow.”

“I see.”

“If you set off like this, you will have to steel yourself as you might die at any moment. I was chased by High Brittania army on my way here… However, this isn’t an order but a request. The commander instructed me not to force you.”

“I understand. Seems like you guys encountered the High Brittania army. Did you travel on the main road?”

“The main road is inaccessible, we will need to make a detour of 10Li (44km).”

“Hmm… It will be fine if that is all.”

“Shall we depart?”

“When I took the request, that Regis kid… Oh, no… Your Sir Strategist already told me. He said the units will probably be in the battlefield when the repairs are done, and the collection will have to wait until after the war. Isn’t that nonsense? The job request is for the repair of a weapon, isn’t the point of a weapon existing for its use in war?”

“Yes.”

“I told him that ‘I will deliver it no matter where you are, just tell me the location ten days later, I will finish its repair before then.’”

And today was the tenth day.

The soldier lowered his head with an expression of respect.

“My deepest gratitude… That sword is the spiritual support for me and my brethens. If it can be sent back to the army, it will definitely guide the Empire to victory!”

Enzo nodded deeply.

And then looked at the Viscountess who was besides him.

“I am sorry, but please leave the scissors here. If I return safely, I will repair it and send it to your residence in one month. If not, do you want this soldier to wait for me to grind their blades?”

Enzo showed the signature on the letter to her.

Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria.

The Fourth Princess of the Belgaria Empire, Commander of the entire western forces, which is now the Fourth Imperial Army.

The Viscountess’ eyes went wide.

“Eh!?”

“Sorry, not all my request are from commoners.”

Enzo said with a superficial smile, and the face of the Viscountess turned red instantly.

But she couldn't say something like 'the scissors of a Viscount House are more important than the sword of the Princess'. She could only try her best to keep her face from twitching.

"E-Eh… It is a great honour to perform a job for Her Highness, of course her task takes priority. Even though I am unworldly, I still know about that. Fu, fufu…"

She sounded generous, but her voice was trembling. She then yelled at her maid "Why are you still standing there!" and ran away.

Enzo turned around and gave a long string of instructions to his disciples.

"We are heading west! Get ready!"

Prologue 2: The Lion and Venomous snake

> Imperial Year 851, 27th May—

High Brittania's attack was much later than expected, probably because of the three consecutive days of rain.

Their already heavy cannons became even harder to move on the muddy roads.

Thanks to the rain, the First Imperial Army led by Latreille had enough time to make their defensive preparations.

They built a fort named Bonaire to the south of the capital.

For the Imperial Capital Versailles that had no city walls, this was the last line of defence.

After absorbing the remnants of the Seventh and Third Army, the First Imperial Army numbered more than forty thousand men, with a large number of cavalry.

Latreille deployed twenty thousand men inside the fort and twenty thousand men outside.

If they focused only on defence, they could garrison all the soldiers inside the fort. But the enemy could ignore them completely and head straight for the capital, so there was no point in doing that. If the enemy didn't remove this threat, they might be attacked from the rear.

When the High Brittania army showed up, it was already the morning of the 27th.

And so, the battle started before noon.

The enemy's cannon— Type 41 Elswick bombarded the Empire.

Fort Bonaire was built on top of a hill, the attackers had a hard time scaling the slope, while the defenders could counter easily.

That might be so, but in terms of the cannon's range, High Brittania had the advantage.

The walls were hit by the shells.

Counter artillery was also fired back.

Fort Bonaire took the shape of the hill, stretching to the east and west in the shape of a crescent.

The towers on the east and west tip attacked the invading enemy troops.

As the defensive towers on both sides were hard to defend, it was built as a separate structure from the beginning. Even if the enemy seize the structure, there would still be a wall blocking them out.

This formed a triangle defence formation.

On the conference table was a map showing the entire battlefield.

Latreille's strategist Germain placed pieces on top of it.

"This is the formation taken by the High Britannians, cannons and infantry in front, while their cavalry covers the flanks and the rear."

Latreille nodded.

“Hmm… I heard that the commander Oswald is a good tactician, but he is using an unexpected head on attack.”

In the conference room, the commander of the Third Army, a middle age Lieutenant General, a young knight commanding the Seventh Army, and seven other officers stood around the table.

Outside the conference room were heavily armoured guards.

The commander of the Third Army, Lieutenant General Buxerou shook his thick beard and spoke loudly:

“Field Marshal, we should send the cavalry to attack now! If we attack their rear, even the new rifles and cannons would be nothing to be afraid of! Let’s show High Brittania our might!”

Coignieres, The young knight commanding the remnants of the Seventh Army said:

“Our main mission right now is to defend our base, there is no need to engage in a war of attrition.”

This knight was a 2nd grade combat officer, a middling rank in the Seventh Army. But with General Barguesonne and the other ranking officers killed in battle, he was tasked with taking command.

Many of the officers deserted before the might of the High Brittania army.

Lieutenant General Buxerou sneered.

“You are scared to such an extent just because you lost one battle?”

“Well… If we don’t face them directly in battle, we won’t be ravaged by the enemy correct? Being arrogant will just lead our subordinates to their death.”

“What did you say!?”

Both sides insisted on their opinion.

It would take a lot of effort to consolidate these opinions.

More importantly, Latreille had bigger problems to tackle.

One week ago, the sneak attack by the Mercenary King Gilbert inflicted a serious injury to his head. He was poisoned back then, and his eyes were gradually failing.

According to the diagnosis of the military doctor, he would remain completely blind in his left eye, and even though his right eye would recover shortly, he will still lose his sight in a few years.

If this news was to spread, it would definitely affect the troop's morale.

It would even put him at a disadvantage in the succession battle.

They definitely must not know about this.

"The enemy formed a line, then we just need to blast at them with cannons. We do have the means for a counter offensive, but with the enemy's rifle and shield composite formation, attacking recklessly would just increase our casualties."

"Prince Latreille already considered this much. Since the enemy could hit our walls, that means it is close enough to fight a melee battle."

"No, it is still far away."

Although they were within the range of the enemy's cannons, the principle that the greater the distance, the smaller the power still applied.

However, if there was danger of the enemy closing in, they would need to reconsider their strategy. They couldn't ignore firepower strong enough to break through walls. The stone walls built in a rush were fairly brittle.

Latreille raised a hand to stop his subordinates' argument.

"Enough, I will consider all of your opinions."

They stopped their quabbles and stood at attention.

The sound of the bombardment could be heard from the windows.

Latreille spoke in a composed manner. If the generals started panicking, it would cause more unease for the subordinates.

“The goal of the Britannia army is to lower the morale of our troops with cannon fire and draw us out to fight. Bonaire’s walls are strong enough to withstand such attacks. If Argentina’s Fourth Army fails, it won’t be too late for us to attack… That will be the plan for now. Everyone keep an eye out for the enemy’s movement and focus on defending.”

The young knight Coignieres had a cheerful smile when his proposal was adopted.

In contrast, Lieutenant General Buxerou gritted his teeth vexingly with his huge beard shaking.

“Field Marshall, are you questioning our abilities?!”

“I have never doubted the might of the Third Army, did my orders showed such doubts?”

“Erm… Not really…”

“If the enemy can’t take down Fort Bonaire, their attack would be halted here forever. One day, they will fall apart and retreat. When that time comes, we will start our counter offensive. Aren’t you looking forward to such a chance?”

“Understood!”

Lieutenant General Buxerou shied away fearfully, then stood at attention and saluted.

Everyone else did the same.

Seeing that the Belgaria Army didn’t take any special actions, the enemy commander Oswald Coulthard withdrew his troops.

Evening—

Germain barged into Latreille’s office.

“Bad news!”

“… What happened?”

Latreille who was leaning on the chair covered his wounded eyes with bandages. He took it off and washed it with water.

As per the doctor’s instruction, ‘to disinfect, try to use boiled water that had cooled down to wash your eyes’.

Germain closed the door and saluted.

“My deep apologies, Prince Latreille. Enemy movement! They are herding the refugees our way.”

“Hmm?”

“They are probably citizens from the villages and towns subjugated by the Britannian Army.”

Belgaria’s citizens had never been attacked by enemy states before, Belgaria had always been the side doing the invading.

But for the war this time, be it the Second Army that engaged in the first battle or the Seventh Army that fought them next, both were decimated in no time, the speed of the enemy’s advance was mind blowing.

“How many of them”

“A conservative estimate would be more than ten thousand. It’s probably because of the slow enemy movement, that’s why they only reached the battlefield now.”

Latreille fell into deep thought.

“That is to say, the Britannian Army captured citizens during their invasion and is using them as hostage?”

“They are herding the masses this way, but they didn’t make any demands so it seems that they just want to release these citizens.”

“I see…”

“Shall we opened the gates and take the refugees in? This might be dangerous…”

“There might be a second layer or even third layer of traps. If we keep the gates shut, it might infuriate the refugees and soldiers.”

“This is a trap after all.”

Germain was a strategist renown for his wisdom and have already thought of the inherent dangers.

“If we open the gates, and the enemy launched their attack as the refugees swarm in… It would be difficult to close the gate then. Even if we close the gate then, it would be hard to watch the citizens being massacred.”

“And there is also the possibility of the enemy disguised as refugees sneaking in. Even if the regular army adheres such a method, there is no guarantee the mercenaries wouldn’t do so.”

“Yes, even if a small number of enemy infiltrate the fort, there is the danger of them attacking and seizing a part of the walls. If that happens, the fort would be no different from a leaking bottle.”

The enemy would then charge the place that had been seized.

He would be severely criticized if he abandoned the refugees.

But accepting the refugees was very risky.

Latreille fell into deep thoughts once again.

“If we instruct the defending army clearly, we should be able to stop any surprise attack. We will only open a part of the gate, and only allow some of the refugees to pass through and check them for weapons. We will be able to finish before dusk.”

“What about the arrangements after that?”

“Taking in ten thousand citizens would increase the consumption of our provisions.”

That might be so… But we can hang on if it is just for half a month. News of the Fourth Army’s victory should be here by then.”

If Altina succeeded in cutting off their supply lines, the enemy wouldn’t be able to carry out its invasion of the Imperial capital.

The enemy's supplies would run out before the Empire's if they defended the fort staunchly.

However, Latreille still had doubts.

"What should we do about the refugees after this?"

"Well…"

"It might be the husband now, and the wife next time. If we don't let the refugees in next time, it might incite a riot. If we fight a civil war with ten thousand citizens in this small fort, we won't be able to defend the attacks from the outside."

"Hmm… But we have no other choice but to take in the refugees."

"We don't have the actual numbers of refugees captured by the enemy. If they number thirty to forty thousand, the provisions in the fort won't be enough."

"We might not even last for two weeks."

Latreille nodded.

He had to make a decision.

"Fort Bonaire is the last line of defence for the Empire, we can't risk it for just ten thousand refugees… On our shoulders is the responsibility of protecting the 1.3 million citizens of the Empire."

"Y-Yes."

At this moment, sound of cannons came from outside the window.

Germain's face turned pale.

Shortly after, a messenger came to report without even knocking.

"It's the enemy! They opened fire at the refugees! Lieutenant General Buxerou have opened the gate!"

"Damn it!"

Germain groaned.

Latreille nursed his temple in resignation.

If the enemy shoot at the refugees, he won't be able to ignore it.

Germain stated his consul with a trembling voice:

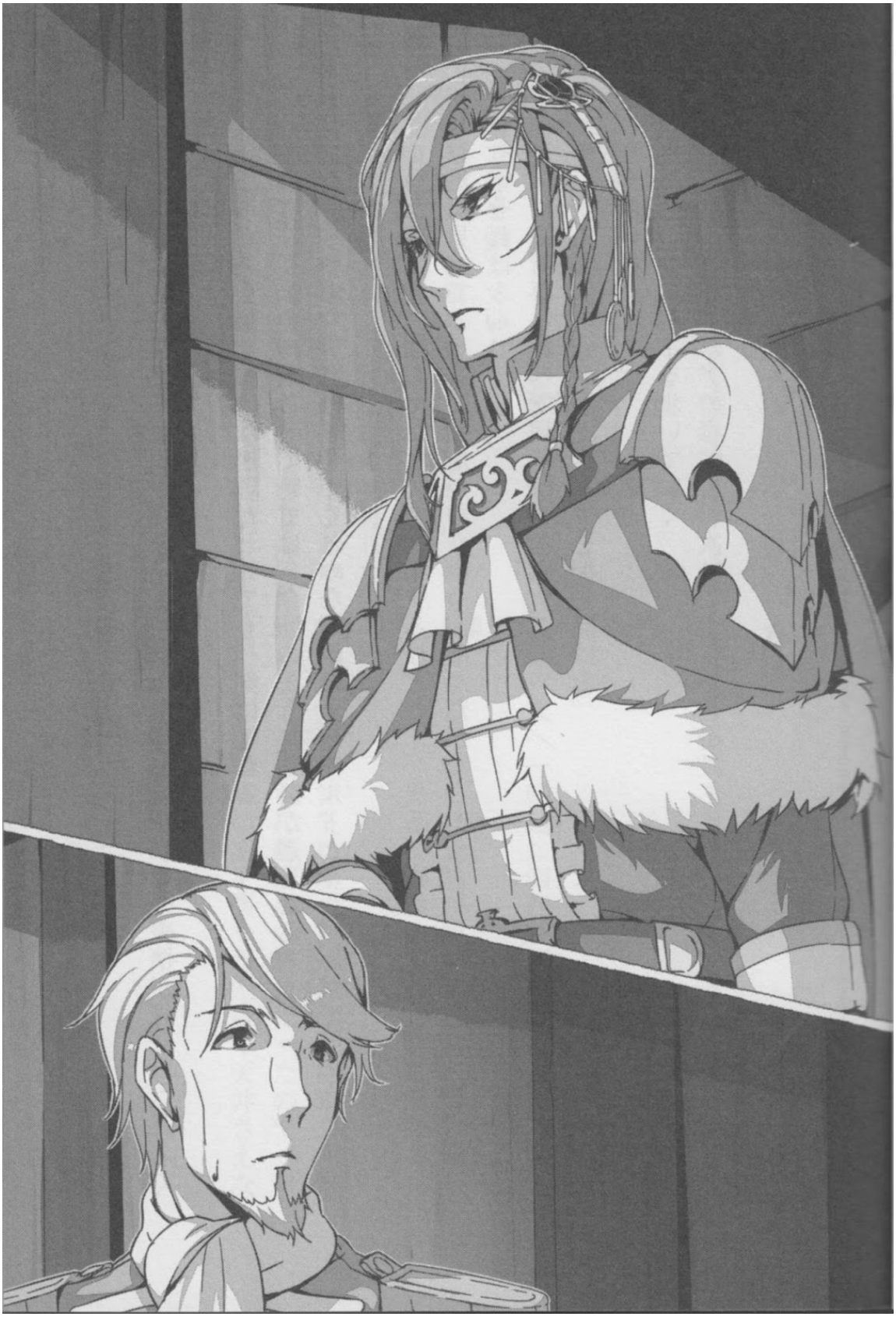
"Should we take in the refugees, please give us your orders quickly!"

"Sigh… Instead of taking back the hand we offered, it would be better not to do so in the first place. This will incur the wrath of the troops, and it would be easier for them to be spurred by emotions instead of military commands. Accept the refugees, we will think about how to deal with them later."

"Yes… I understand, we will check the refugees for weapons now."

"Alright."

Latreille stood up.



And said to Germain who was about to leave the room.

“We lost the initiative because of our misjudgement. It is unwise, but

we can only take to the field now.”

“B-But, what about your health!?”

As the messenger is still outside the room, Latreille said softly:

“A lot of the poison had been cleared… My sight is still a bit blur, but it’s good enough.”

“Really?”

“If it is this close, I can see your face clearly.”

“Your Highness…”

Latreille looked at Germain with his right eye. It was a bit blur, but being about to discern the expression on his face was proof that his eyesight was recovering.

“Sigh… I can’t let my guard down. The enemy commander Oswald is a very cruel character.”

“That is true. Using refugees he captured to carry out such a tactic! Just like a snake!”

“What about me, who considered abandoning the refugees…”

“T-That’s because your highness…”

“Enough, no need for pleasantries in a war.”

Latreille closed the door himself.

The messenger saluted, and walked out to the corridor.

Venomous Snake of High Britannia, it will be our counterattack next time.

Chapter 1 - Today, Tomorrow

> Imperial Year 851, 3rd June, Morning—

After the Fourth Imperial Army recapture Chaineboule City, it marched to a hill 10Li (44km) to its east, and set up base there.

The place was surrounded by vast plains with white clouds and gentle winds.

If they weren't at war, this would be a great place to take an afternoon nap.

After resupplying in the west, the headquarters finally had a large tent.

In the aftermath of the battle of Lafressange, it was a rush against time as they forced marched to the west coast. Not just the tents, they even abandoned their cannons. During that time, the headquarters were just surrounded with simple canvas, and didn't even have a roof.

And now, the new tent even had windows to take in sunlight, and was rather lavish.

It was guarded with many heavily armoured infantry.

In the headquarters, both the commander Altina and the strategist Regis were present.

The maid Clarisse was preparing tea.

"Please have some."

"Thank you."

After receiving the tea cup, Regis could finally moisten his parched

throat.

Altina tapped on the map laid on the table.

“Sir Jerome sure is slow.”

“... He was tasked with all sorts of miscellaneous jobs after all. Putting that aside, when it’s time to rest, we should rest.”

Regis opened the book in his hand.

The book in his hands right now related the tale of a young man who entered the Military Academy once again. It wasn’t because he was retained, he was just caught by the powers of someone with superpowers that could turn back time. Such was youth.

Altina poked Regis’ cheeks.

“It’s fine to read books, but spend some time with me too.”

“Eh? You want to discuss something?”

“Not that… Chat with me sometimes… Have some tea together… Is that okay?”

“But the only thing I can talk about are the contents of books.”

“That is fine too.”

Altina was making a fuss out of nowhere and puffed her cheeks.

She seemed angry— That might be so, but it didn't feel that way either.

Regis tried his best to recall similar scenes which was similar to the way she acts.

She was like a girl cajoling a good friend or lover…

Impossible.

She was the fourth Princess of the Belgarian Empire. And she was the commander of the Fourth Imperial Army, and holds the rank of Lieutenant General.

Only fifteen of age, she set her sights on becoming the next Empress, a girl supported by many soldiers and citizens, especially the new nobles of the south.

Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria is not like a girl of common birth.

In contrast, Regis had very low evaluation of himself.

All this while, he could only search for similar situations he read in books, and achieve victory with the help of excellent teammates and luck. He had never thought that he possess extraordinary talent himself.

In the end, Regis thought of himself as 'if a situation similar to the ones found in books doesn't happen, he won't be able to do anything.'

Since he took up the post of Altina's strategist— handling the wretched inspector was Eric's merit, and he couldn't do anything about Latreille's scheme during the trip to the Imperial capital Versailles in April at the very beginning.

He then collated Eric's hint, Eleanor's information and the fact uncovered by Altina to set up a way to counter them.

When the Seventh Imperial Army fought the High Britanians, he knew that charging with the classic tight formation would present

problems, but he couldn't raise an opinion that would change the mind of the commander.

Regis thought of himself as just a second rate strategist.

Furthermore, he was bad with swordsmanship and couldn't ride a horse.

He had no charm as a man at all.

Because of all these reasons, he ruled out the possibility that 'Altina was cajoling to a lover', not worthy of further review— At least it wasn't possible for Regis.

If that was so, what was Altina thinking?

"I am bored now, tell me an interesting story— that's what you mean? That might be so, but I can't spin an interesting tale like a bard."

Regis smiled wryly.

Altina had sure made a difficult request.

"What, you are making me sound like a wilful Empress."

"Well, not to the extent of 'tell me an interesting story every night or I will kill you' like that person."

"What is that!?"

"Eh? You didn't know? In the past, there was a king…"

Regis told her a story he read in the past. Even though Regis had always been reading books, he still understood how he could tell the story in a way to make it interesting and easy to understand.

Not just Altina, even Clarisse was listening intently.

He related the tale while drinking tea, and when he was about to finish his tea…

"Brigadier General Beilschmidt and Lieutenant General Beaumarchais are seeking an audience."

A heavy infantry guard outside the tent announced.

Jerome Jean de Beilschmidt was a renowned general who held the title of ‘Black Knight’ and ‘Hero of Erstein’.

He was now serving under Altina, but he was still the amongst the top generals of the Empire.

Regis trusted him unconditionally in a battle.

He entered the tent with a knight who had orange hair.

That was the commander of the Second Imperial Army, Lieutenant General Benjamin Emanuel de Beaumarchais.

The eldest brother of the Beaumarchais Marquis House.

His younger brother Jestin Gabriel was the deputy commander.

By the way, the third brother Germain was Latreille’s trusted aide.

Regis saw Benjamin during the Founding Day Festival in April, but they didn’t speak.

Right now, he showed an unsatisfied face after making his greetings.

The Second Army that was devastated by the High Britannians was assigned to the new Fourth Army by the orders of Field Marshal Latreille.

So Benjamin was now a subordinate of Altina.

The Belgarian Empire had a deep Patriarchal mindset.

Furthermore, Altina was just fifteen.

It was natural for Lieutenant General Beaumarchais who was almost forty to feel uncomfortable.

At the same time, the Beaumarchais Marquis House was one of the grand nobles based around the capital, which meant he belonged to the Second Prince faction.

The political enemy of the Fourth Princess in the struggle to inherit the throne.

If not for the war with High Britania that threatened the survival of the Empire, the two sides would be at each other's throats.

He is probably thinking the same thing, Regis thought.

Will they use this chance and send him to his death in order to gain a slight advantage in their political struggle? It was natural for Benjamin to have such doubts.

He didn't take a seat after entering the tent, but survey the surroundings with cautious eyes instead.

"……"

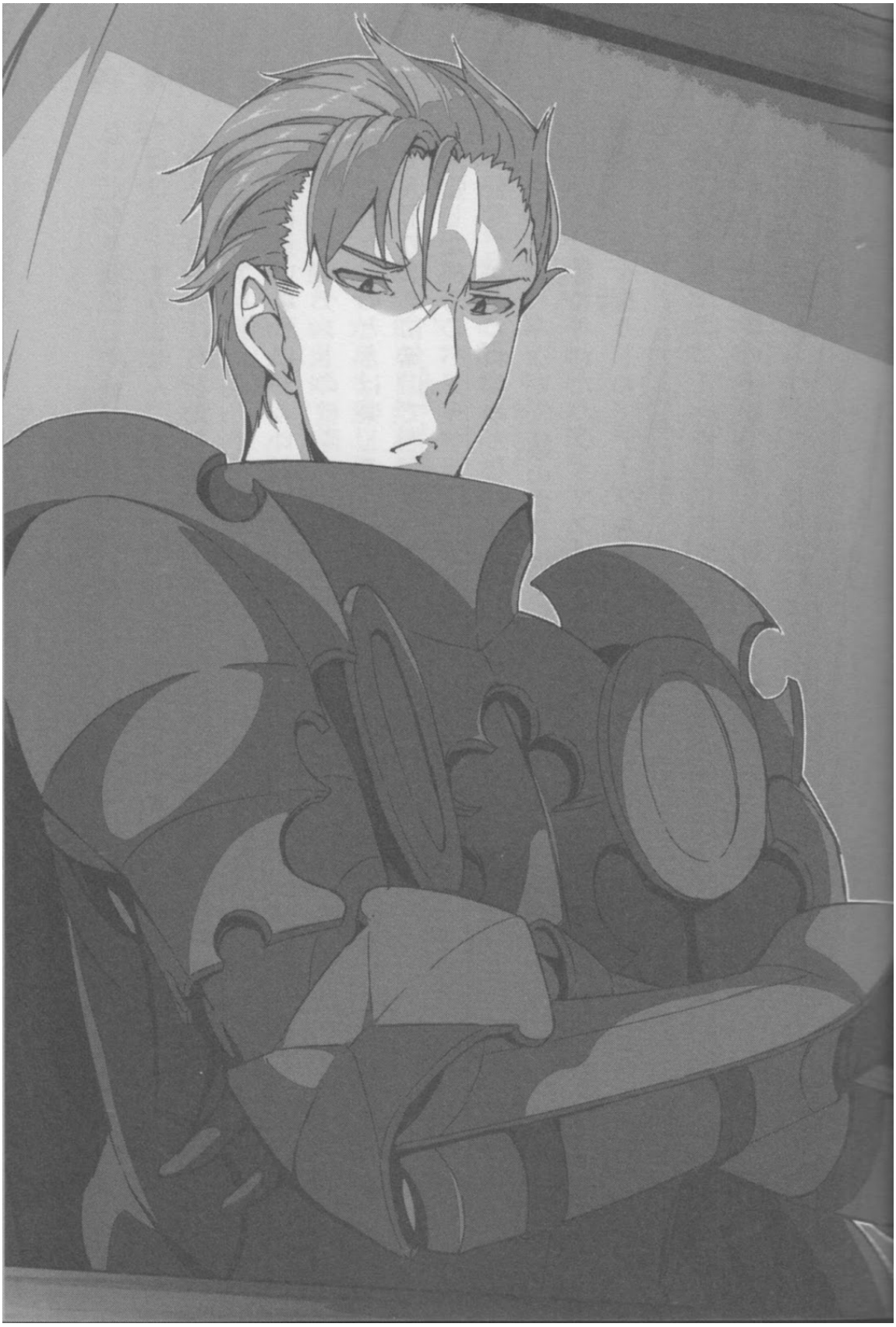
"Please have a seat."

Regis gestured. Benjamin pondered for a moment and nodded.

"Alright."

He must have judged that it was inappropriate for him to remain standing alone.

Jerome who entered at the same time treated this place like his own home, grabbing a chair and sat down.



“Really, you are really a slave driver! Did you messed up when you ask the cavalry to transport resources!?”

“Ah… Sorry. The infantry would have taken too much time.”

At this moment all the key personnels had been gathered.

Sitting at the innermost end was Altina, with Regis on her left.

Jerome was closest to the entrance, and to his right was Benjamin who was stretching his back.

Clarisse stood at a corner like an expressionless statue. She would only smile in front of people she was close to, and would be as cold as a doll in the presence of others.

Altina said to Lieutenant General Benjamin who still seemed nervous.

“Thank you for your hard work! How is everyone doing?”

She spoke without restraint, which was her style.

However, Lieutenant General Benjamin was like a child who couldn’t solve a maths problem, staring at the table with his fists clenched tight.

“……”

To him, Altina wasn’t just royalty, she was also his commander.

But she was a girl fifteen years of age, and the central figure of his rival faction.

His complicated position and thoughts made him sweat profusely, and he couldn’t even make standard reports.

Jerome shrugged.

“The soldiers? They are confused since they were performing a mission they don’t understand. ‘Bring as much lake water back with buckets?!’ Are you trying to make a pond?”

“Well… Even though I explained how we are using it…”

Jerome snorted.

“I don’t understand what you are saying, it’s like magic. Should we summon the inquisition?”

“... This is based on basic natural sciences.”

Altina leaned forward.

“Regis just got to the good part of the story he was telling just now. It is very interesting.”

“N-Nothing… It’s just a simple tale…”

Jerome glanced at Regis with a weird look.

“Hey Regis, I thought you are just a strategist, you are actually a bard too? Even though you are so weak!”

“... I am not a bard, but I already know that I am weak.”

“During my time in the capital, I hated sissy men the most! I won’t even talk to them if I see them in the palace. If you are a man, you should pick up a sword!”

“Then I will counterattack with my lance!”

“Erm… That’s not the problem here…”

“Tch, guys who can only coax little girls with sweet words are Putains! Garbage!”

“I-I am a princess! I won’t get coaxed!”

Regis shook his head in resignation.

Altina’s face was red from panic.

“Hah!? I wasn’t coaxed… I just thought that the story was interesting… Yes, that’s all.”

Even the roots of her ears were red.

Benjamin rolled his eyes when he saw this. Based on his common sense, this was an unthinkable situation.

Royalty should be treated with more respect, military conference should be more serious and to the point. Conversations between nobles should be more elegant.

Jerome knocked on the map laid out on the table.

It was a map that sketched a certain place.

Normally, it should be detailing the terrain around their own forces, but it wasn't so. It was a map of a place that was further to the east.

"Hey Regis? You said the High Britannians will stop here. How do you know that?"

"... I already assigned the advanced work party some preparatory work."

"Preparations? They are not deers or rabbits, why would they stay here? Are you going to dig tunnels again?"

"Hmm… The water level is higher in this region, it would be difficult to drain away water if we dig holes. It would be possible for the granary areas, but it is the territory of Duke Chautiene, and they have been raising sheeps for a living since ancient times…"

"Hah!? That doesn't matter! Ten thousand enemy soldiers are 5Li (22km) away from there! How can we dispose of those ten thousand bastards!?"

"... Not a problem, I have a plan."

Regis didn't have confidence in his talent, he thought that he was just relying on similar problems and solutions he read from books.

"You said that again."

"You heard about the famous work by Georges Jean 'the Hero of Canekkie Plains'? As a scientist, all of his works are based on scientific research…"

Jerome gave him a look.

"If I read that book, can I adapt to any situations?"

"Well… Not to such a fantastical degree… Everyone can only come up with a conclusion based on their own experiences and information, and combine it with the knowledge within books. If it was something they don't know, they wouldn't be able to make such

a conclusion."

"That's true."

"... When solving problems, one should search from the knowledge they already knew. My source of knowledge are books, I can only remember what books I read and their contents, that's all."

Jerome thought about it.

He had always dismissed Regis' opinions, but he made a rare show of considering his words.

"This seem to resemble the relationship between muscles and food."

"Ahh, I see. People will eat everyday. But when you move your muscles, you won't think about each and everything you have eaten right?"

"I get it. So that means a guy like you is someone who remember what he eats when you move your muscles! What a weirdo!"

Even when Jerome told him that in a tone of despise, Regis didn't get angry.

"Such an analogy isn't wrong… but is it weird to know clearly where my knowledge stems from…?"

"Hah! Instead of that, explain the strategy first!"

"Erm… Sorry."

After knowing about how he wasn't normal, Regis thought it was expected that others think he was strange.

* * *

The knight Kruger was a second grade combat officer assigned to Jerome five years ago. That was before they were reassigned to the Beilschmidt border regiment.

His strength was top notched within the Fourth Army, and he was a

trusted subordinate of Jerome.

With short brown hair and sharp eyes, he had a deep scar on his face, giving others the impression that he was very strict.

That might be so, the scar was from a knife wound inflicted by his wife when she discovered his extramarital affairs…

Second grade combat officer Abidal Evra was commissioned in the same class as him.

Born as a commoner, he was bestowed the nobility title of Chevalier. The two of them became the pillars of the knight corp.

Speaking of which…

In April, Abidal Evra was the one who escorted Princess Argentina to the capital and back.

After that, he was entrusted with many tasks.

Be it escorting Her Highness to Rouen City or guarding the strategist Regis enroute to the Harbour, it was all assigned to him.

Up till now, the mission of escorting the Princess has always been done by the Fort Evrard defense captain's grandson, the young knight Eric, but...

Ever since Eric got injured, the escort duties had all fallen onto Abidal Evra.

On the other hand, Kruger didn't achieve outstanding results in his unit, and was now performing simple tasks of escorting the pioneers[W].

"Sigh, what a huge difference. I really want to do something grand that will make me famous…"

Unfortunately, such an opportunity never came.

* * *

Imperial Year 851, 3rd June, Evening—

Kruger led one hundred knights and headed east. But it wasn't a glorious mission of being the vanguard.

They advanced 20Li (88km) to the east of the Fourth Army's headquarters. They came here before the arrival of the High Britannian supply team.

The mission was to guard the pioneers.

The pioneers numbered about two hundred men.

They knew they had arrived before the enemy, but wasn't sure why they need to prepare to camp for the night.

Instructions from the strategist Regis were… Unfathomable.

It wasn't the preparation of a trap.

There wasn't anything special here, and after surveying the surroundings, there weren't even any tall hills in the vicinity.

The sun was about to set. With the sun turning red as it descend into the west, it cast elongated shadows of the soldiers standing in the moist grasslands.

"Hah…"

When he was sighing, the captain of the pioneers, Ferdinand Stuttgart came to his side.

Hailing from the Germanian Federation, he performed exceptionally during the attack on Fort Volks in taking measurements and digging the tunnel, and was highly evaluated.

He was a short amiable man with a small moustache.

"Sir Kruger, our work here is done!"

"Oh? That's faster than expected."

"As instructed by the strategist, we only built it halfway."

“What is that strategist thinking!?”

Kruger said loudly, and Ferdinand merely respond with a wry smile.

The pioneers started retrieving their tools, but there were some who were scattering them around.

“The things left behind are older tools. If we kept it too tidily, it wouldn’t look like we are faking it.”

“This is the instruction of the strategist too?”

“He is a man who is very particular about details.”

“Hmm… Anyway, the units that are carrying the heavier items will move off first, we will send the rest by horses and wagons.”

Ferdinand nodded and prepared to set off with his pioneers—

At this moment, the sentry from the west ran over.

“It’s the enemy! The enemy is here!”

“How many!?”

“About thirty men! They appear to be scouts!”

Scouts will advance in front of the main party, and were responsible for detecting traps and ambushes.

Normally, there wouldn’t be so many of them, and they would immediately report back to the main party if they encountered any enemies.

This was to ensure that they won’t be wiped out even if they were ambushed. Sometimes, they would capture civilians who spotted them.

The civilians would be tasked to carry their supplies, and robbed of their fortune, such things were normal on the battlefield.

The face of the pioneers leader Ferdinand turned green.

“It’s the enemy! Sir Kruger, let’s escape!”

“Hold it! If we run off so simply, wouldn’t all our plans be exposed? The strategist must have considered this possibility.”

“Y-Yes. We didn’t notice the enemy and set up camp here. And then…”

“We will protect you, don’t worry.”

“I understand… The enemy is the Mercenary King Gilbert, a merciless man.”

Kruger squinted his eyes and looked to the west.

“Ahh… That’s right, the Mercenary King is here.”

An expert with the trident, it was said that he had never been defeated. Not just highly skilled in combat, he was also an excellent commander and had never lost any battles.

— What if I defeat him?

The supply unit of the High Britannians will affect the entire war.

And the one commanding the supply unit was the Mercenary King Gilbert.

The man who decided the fate of the Empire, such a title wouldn’t be an exaggeration.

If he is killed by me, Kruger, then I will be the man who lead the army to victory, and accomplishing great war merits would no longer be a dream. Just like Jerome who earned the title of ‘Hero of Erstein’, I will be hailed by the masses as the ‘Hero of Lafressange’. I might even become a real noble such as a Baron...

The figures of riders appeared on the west of the hill.

It’s the High Britannians.

Since the scouts were here, the main party must be nearby.

We have more men, taking those riders shouldn’t be a problem.

They are equipped with the newest rifles, but there are only thirty of

them, we have one hundred cavalry, two hundred infantry— They might be infantry, but they are actually pioneers, even though it wasn't obvious from their appearance.

The scouts withdrew.

If I challenged him to a one on one duel, the Mercenary King will probably accept.

Kruger was lost in his dream.

Just like how the Princess challenged the hero Jerome half a year ago— He imagined challenging the Mercenary King to a proper duel and winning.

"Fufufu…"

"Shouldn't we retreat, Sir Kruger!?"

Ferdinand asked fearfully.

I will put an end to this war—

In the end, Kruger swallowed these words back.

"Tch… By the way, what else did the strategist say?"

"Eh? What?"

"I think it was… 'Don't be too caught up with achieving merits, retreating is also part of a battle.' Something strange like that."

"I-Indeed, an order to not stife for accomplishment on the battlefield is incomprehensible… Why is he known as the wizard?"

"Eh…"

Maybe it's a nickname the people gave the strategist, that's all.

But could a normal man seize Fort Volks, save the defeated Seventh Army, or even win against the powerful 'Queen's Navy'?

"The strategist must have considered this too."

"Considered…"

Speaking of which, he ordered cannons not in range to fire, and archers out of range to shoot… During the naval battle, he also allow a large allied ship to be sunk.

Kruger broke out in cold sweat.

The scouts shouted again:

“The enemy main forces are here!”

They probably heard the intel from the scouts, so the soldiers holding rifles rushed over.

The Mercenary King was probably among them.

Kruger drew his sword.

And issued the order.

“All units… Retreat! Make haste!”

The cavalry immediately turn their back to the enemies and ran. The rest of the Pioneers either climbed onto carriages or horses, forgetting about the camp they built halfway and ran off.

— *Damn it! Is there any meaning in escaping so shamefully!?*

Just as planned, Kruger’s unit turned their back to the sun and headed east, crossing over two hills along the way.

The enemy was a supply team, most of the soldiers were tasked with protecting the supplies. They won’t send riders to pursue for a handful of enemies.

After Kruger made a huge detour, he made it back to the main camp of the Fourth Imperial Army.

By that time, the sky had completely darken.

* * *

Imperial Year 851, 2nd June, Noon—

On a narrow road in Lafressange hill, a carriage moved slowly.

The blacksmith Enzo sat on the luggage compartment.

The wagon was loaned by the blacksmith guild, it was a large wagon pulled by two horses. The top of the carriage was covered.

The Union wasn't willing to loan out the carriage when they found out it was headed towards a battlefield, but when he explained the trip was to deliver the treasure sword for Princess Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria, their attitude changed immediately.

The Union chief took charge personally, saying: 'If the sword is not delivered, it will be a disgrace to the blacksmiths of Rouen!', and loaned the carriage to Enzo.

To prove his words, Enzo showed the sword to the chief…

As expected of the chief, he had seen the drawings of 'Grand Tonnerre Quatre' before, and complimented the restoration done to the sword.

'Grand Tonnerre Quatre', which the Princess Argentina borrowed from the Emperor, was altered during the time of peace. Maybe it was done for ceremonial use, or to make it easier for the reigning Emperor at that time to hold?

The result of altering it because of such non-issues was the addition of decorative items that broke its balance.

Regis once said 'the art museum in the capital has paintings of the sword before it was altered.' Enzo memorized it after visiting, and finally restored the treasure sword to its original form.

He was proud of his perfect work.

The new 'Grand Tonnerre Quatre' had a thick hilt, which matched the heavy body of the sword.

The balance was restored.

However, how many people could wield this sword freely?

The Princess was petite, so it was hard to imagine her holding it.

He had never seen the Princess using the sword in battle.

Although he fixed the treasure sword as requested, and was sure it was much better as a weapon now, it would require more arm strength than before.

— Well, he wouldn't know the details unless he saw it for himself.

That's why he had loaded his crafting tools onto the carriage.

Besides his toolbox was his disciple Lionel. He was carving a piece of wood, unaffected by the shaking carriage.

"Hmm? What is it, Master?"

"Ah… I actually wanted you to stay behind and take over my work."

"I became your disciple because I admired your work. This is the most important job in master's life right? I want to see it to the end."

"The other disciples shied away when they knew I was heading into a war zone."

In the end, only Lionel came along.

"It's great that they accepted the job of staying behind. Thanks to them, we won't dally on the customers' requests even if I am not around."

"That's true."

No matter how important the Princess' job was, he couldn't be late in handling the other customers' requests.

If his disciples did their best, he won't delay the other jobs he accepted even if he didn't return in time.

"For their sake, we have to return alive."

“Yes.”

They bravely faced the unpredictable danger.

Enzo wondered if this man named Lionel was braver than him, or was he just simply optimistic.

“By the way, we should be reaching the next town soon.”

“Yes, the map does say there is a small town around here…”

A canvas was draped over over the carriage to shelter them from rain and the wind. He rolled up the canvas and looked outside…

“Wait,” he told the driver.

“Where’s the town?”

“Erm…”

“It’s destroyed!”

“What!?”

He thought the towns far away from the main road would be fine…

The fencing made to keep wild beasts away was in tatters.

A corpse on one end of the road bored the mark of bullets.

Enzo groaned.

“… The High Britannians actually attacked the towns.”

“That’s too despicable.”

Lionel placed his hands on his chest to soothe his rage.

“What should we do!?” The driver asked.

“Just sneak through here like this,” Enzo answered.

If an invading army attacked a town, the purpose would be to pillage.

Be it people or items, they will rob everything of value.

Or rather, if anyone was still around, they would probably be enemy troops.

They advanced cautiously.

Lionel pointed in front.

“Someone is there!”

“Hmm!?”

Enzo thought for a moment.

If it was the enemy, they should run away now. But it might be survivors.

The drivers who had small eyes was opening them wide right now.

“Do we run!?”

“... No! Let’s take a look!”

The carriage advanced slowly.

Enzo and Lionel leaned out of the carriage and stared at that place.

They only saw a cloak tied to a tree swaying with the wind, that’s all.

“... Hey? Lionel?”

“S-Sorry Master… I must have been mistakened…”

“Phew… don’t scare me like that.”

Enzo sighed softly.

At that moment—

The horse neighed and suddenly stopped.

The carriage also braked immediately, almost throwing Enzo off the carriage.

Lionel lost his balance, and the carving in his hand flew out.

“Wahh!?”

“Shhh, shhh!”

The driver shushed the horses to calm them.

Enzo supported the large crate that was about to fall off, and pushed it back to its original position with some effort.

“W-What happened!?”

“Sorry! Something just dashed across!”

— What was that?

Maybe it’s an animal.

“My apologies, I must have alarmed you.”

The voice that drew near in an instant gave Enzo and the others a fright.

A man stood besides the driver.

An elderly man wearing a brown robe.

In his hand was a delicate carving.

“This fell off.”

His wrinkled face smiled, deepening them further.

After receiving that carving, Lionel bowed deeply.

“T-Thank you… Erm… Are you a survivor of this town?”

“No. I just reached here, and was thinking about searching for survivors.”

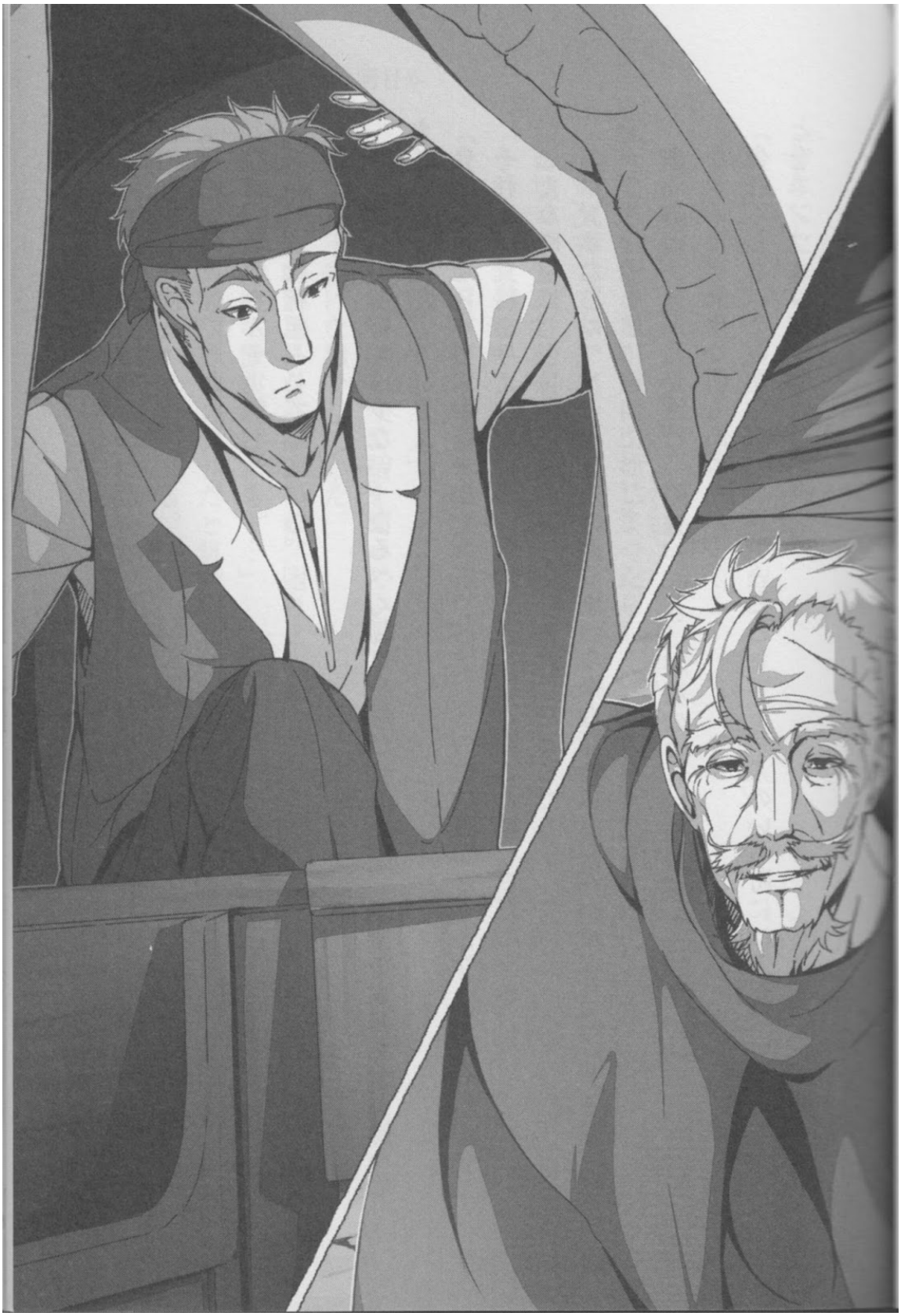
The old man shook his head.

Both parties fell silent.

As if they were keeping a moment of silence for the deceased townspeople, everyone kept quiet.

A moment later, Enzo asked:

“What brings you to this town?”



“I am running low on food, and was thinking of buying something

here. I didn't imagine that I would see such a scene."

"What a disaster."

"That's true. Instead of a war, this was more like a catastrophe."

Enzo thought as he clenched his fist.

"True…"

Their provisions were limited. They wanted to rush to their destination with a light load, so they didn't bring much food and water.

If they shared with the old man, they won't have enough.

And giving some supplies to the old man would just delay the inevitable.

Even if he scavenge for food in the town to survive another day or two...

Enzo came from Rouen City to the east, which just happened to be the opposite direction the High Britannians were invading from.

Many of the cities were pillaged and the people ran away, leaving behind ruins.

Although there were still some relatively safer places...

Enzo knew that there was another town about two days journey by foot to the east.

"What are your plans?"

"Can you sell me some food, how much will it cost?"

Enzo wasn't good at lying.

After pondering for quite a while, he explained the current situation to the old man with a wry smile.

"It's the thought that counts, don't feel bad about this. Since you came this way, there must be a task you want to complete, right?"

“Yes, that’s right.”

“I have no intentions of holding back the strides of the young. Even if I pass on here on this land, I will be satisfied.”

Lionel thought about this seemingly deep words.

The driver asked uneasily.

“Dear customer, it will be troubling if we don’t have enough provisions.”

“Even so, I can’t just leave him…”

Enzo finally sort out his mind.

He turned to the old man.

“Sorry, we have to head to the battlefield. We will be joining the soldiers waiting for us, and head for one of the Imperial Armies.”

“Oh, an army.”

“This is urgent, we don’t have the time to make a detour to another town.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

The old man shook his head and shrug.

Enzo was thinking of another way.

“Well then, if you are willing to come with us to the war zone, we can give you a ride. How about it?”

The old man opened his eyes wide.

Lionel also looked at his master in surprise.

The driver muttered with a worried expression.

“Is that really fine? Our food and water might not be enough.”

Enzo shrugged.

“Even if he head east and reach the other town in several days, it

might be deserted. He won't see any towns unless he scale the mountains northwards, and there are no towns to the south."

"Furthermore, even if we give the old man provisions for a day or two, it won't be of much help."

"That might be so…"

"Since we can't just leave him, it would be better to bring him to the warzone. If we ration a little, we should be able to make it."

The driver agreed and nodded.

If there wasn't enough food, Enzo thought that he could just give his share to the old man. He wouldn't die if he didn't eat or drink for a day.

The old man asked:

"Do you have to head for the battlefield."

"Yes, because we have something very important to do."

"Hmmm… That's true, instead of staying here, it would be better to follow you to the battlefield."

"If we are lucky, we can meet up with the Imperial Army. Food and water wouldn't be a problem then."

The old man nodded deeply.

"Great!"

"Ah?"

"You are a true man! I like that!"

"Erm, thanks."

"I am an old man who came from the capital, please take me with you."

"I am a blacksmith from Rouen city, this is my disciple."

"Good day, I am Lionel. From sewing machines to armour, do visit

our store if you need anything!”

After hearing the disciple said something so casual, the old man laughed.

Enzo pointed at the load-carrying tray.

“Lionel, please make some space.”

“Alright. Let’s stack these boxes here… It would be better to tie the covers up, please wait a moment.”

Pardon me— The old man said and boarded.

Enzo unconsciously noticed something tied to the left of the old man’s brown robes.

“... You have a sword?”

“Of course. Not having any weapons while traveling is dangerous, this is for self defence.”

“It’s fine, just my occupational habit.”

“Regrettably, this isn’t anything valuable, just something cheap.”

The old man pulled back his cloak to show them his sword.

Just like he said, it was a normal mass produced sword that could be found anywhere.

Lionel who cleared some space gestured for the old man to sit on a rug.

“Your butt will hurt if you sit for too long.”

“Compared to camping out in the wild, this is heavenly.”

“My skills will become dull if I keep idling. If possible, can I sharpen your sword?”

“Hm? that, should be fine…”

The old man seemed to be waiting for Enzo to acknowledge, so Enzo said:

“Please leave it to him if it is okay with you. His skills aren’t bad. It wouldn’t be a surprise if he struck out on his own next year.”

“No, I’m still learning. I will still be counting on Master’s tutelage.”

As he spoke, Lionel took out his sharpening tools and prepared to get started.

The old man leaned on a crate, and sighed in relief.

“Phew, thank god for showing me grace.”

“Meeting in such a place was like a sign from god… I have prayed sincerely before, of course.”

The driver raised his whip and the carriage moved off once again.

* * *

Imperial Year 851, 3rd June, Night—

The sky was filled with stars.

They will be heading over today.

After being resupplied, the Fourth Army had plenty of equipment.

The commander and commissioned officers stayed in huge tents, the rank and file only had simple tents, but it was enough to shelter them from chill and rain.

In the center of the large tents were simple beds for Altina and the maid Clarisse.

Inside the tent besides them was the room of Regis who had been promoted to a commissioned officer…

Regis sat inside the carriage that was unhooked from the horses.

The white and beautiful carriage was large enough for six people to

hold a meeting in it.

The windows were made from high quality glass, and the axles of the carriage were secured with springs.

This was the highest quality carriage in this era, not something that could be bought with the budget of a border regiment. It was a personal gift from the southern new noble Eleanor to Regis.

Designed as a mobile command center, it had a small foldable table, and Regis placed plenty of documents onto it.

The light from the lamps hanging on the walls were swaying.

Knock knock.

The sound of knocking broke the silence.

“Hmmm?”

Regis lift his head from his book and looked out the window.

The hills that were only illuminated by the stars were pitch dark. The only thing he could see from the windows was his reflection that was lit by lamp. He couldn’t see anything outside.

No matter what, someone dangerous wouldn’t knock the door.

Regis turned the handle and opened the carriage door.

The light shone on the visitor.

The swaying orange light contrasted with the fiery vermillion hair. Even the dim lamplight couldn’t conceal the breathtaking beauty of her porcelain white skin and ruby like eyes.

“… Ah.”

“Are you free, Regis?”

The one visiting was Altina.

Her lips were smiling, but it couldn’t hide the nervousness in her voice. Did she have something to discuss?

“Y-Yes…”

Regis tidied the books sprawled out on the seats.

His heartbeat was racing for unknown reasons.

It was already midnight, but it wasn’t anything unusual about a commander seeing a strategist the night before battle.

But the sight of her in the night had a different charm from usual. She had a fragrance that seemed to be from fairy tales. Regis wondered if he was dreaming.

Altina got onto the carriage.

And sat opposite Regis.

“Thank you for your hard work, still not turning in?”

“... I will be working through the night.”

“Is the preparation for tomorrow not done yet?”

“That isn’t so, the main tasks have been entrusted to Sir Jerome. We have begun the battle operation. According to the Pioneers that returned and scout reports, the enemy has set up camp in the place we predicted.”

“Can we win?”

“... According to the current situation, if we can’t defeat the supply team, it will make me wonder if they have the help of a wizard.”

“How confident.”

“No, I just…”

“Alright alright, you are going to say ‘I just happen to know’, right?”

Altina said with a smile and Regis scratched his head.

She took one of the documents on the table and looked.

It was the map of this area, from Chaineboule City in the west to the hills of Lafressange.

“… What’s the matter?”

“Hey, I don’t understand something… Maybe I’m a bit dumb, but I don’t get this.”

“What is it?”

“I am thinking if Regis already expected the High Britanian supply team would escape from Chaineboule?”

It was rare to see Altina carefully choosing her words.

Regis didn’t answer.

“……”

“Sir Jerome’s unit wasn’t far from Chaineboule back then right? Why did you give the order not to attack the escaping enemy units?”

“… True.”

“For example, if we blocked the exit of the city, the supply unit wouldn’t be able to escape. We can then order the fleets to fire upon the city. Even the invincible Mercenary King would have no choice but to surrender right? Well… If I can think of it, Regis can do it too, I just want to know why you didn’t do so.”

It wasn’t a suspicious attitude.

Altina was like a curious student raising a question to her teacher.

Trusting your subordinates too much was dangerous…

But right now, Regis should be happy about being trusted.

“Hmm… I shouldn’t explain this too clearly…”

“No problem. There are no one else around the carriage, and no one will come here. Your words are just for my ears.”

Speaking of which, Altina’s ears were more keen than a dog, and her eyes could rival a cat.

“… I understand, then I will share my views… It’s not a reason that will make anyone happy, and might cause internal strife if the wrong

people hears it. No matter how much you trust them, do not tell them about this."

"Okay."

Altina nodded obediently.

Regis lowered his voice and said:

"... Simply put it's because I don't trust the Second Army."

"Eh? Not confident in their strength?"

"... No, it's not about that."

Regis was hesitant to speak, but since he already said this much, he had to make it clear.

"Who can be sure that the Second Army is not in cahoots with the Britanians?"

Ah— Altina opened her mouth wide.

"... Sir Jerome and the border regiment are well trained soldiers. They didn't let their guard down even after joining up with the Second Imperial Army. Even if they are in bed with the enemy, it wouldn't cause too much damage. Protecting Altina is the top priority… That's why I entrust this mission to them."

"Right."

"But things won't be so simple when we fight the Britannians. If they turn on us in the midst of battle, we will suffer greatly."

"So that's what you think."

"... We might all be soldiers for the same nation, but they might not be completely on our side."

"Then why didn't you tell me this before hand?"

"You are an straightforward person, if I ask you to be wary of them, your attitude would be completely different. On top of that, the Second Imperial Army was reorganized into the Fourth without prior

warning and have a new commander, it was impossible for them not to feel a little a little resistant to this."

"That's true, Benjamin always looks so serious."

"… He is probably wondering if the commander will betray them… Like using them as a sacrificial pawn to bait the enemy."

"I won't do that!"

"… Let's assume that in a terrible situation, the Fourth Army had to choose to sacrifice half of our soldiers. I would definitely choose to save my own border regiment and old guards… If I didn't do so, the soldiers would probably protest."

"Ughh… That… I can understand."

Because the Beilschmidt border regiment was also part of the Fourth Imperial Army…

It was a fact the Fourth Army was formed after absorbing the Second Army. It was natural that the old units led by the commander Altina would become the core of the Fourth Army.

If the old guards didn't receive better treatment, they will feel that it was unfair.

For humans, injustice was a strong medicine.

Even more so if it was a matter of life and death.

Jealousy and survival instinct will make them uneasy, which will fill them with rage, and become a trigger point for a riot.

"… When the new troops joined our ranks, the thing I watched closely was the old guards and whether they felt any unfairness. However, if the preferential treatment is too obvious, it will weaken the cohesiveness of the new soldiers. I wanted Altina to not be over cautious before we find a balance point in how we treat our troops…"

"Regis is right. If I thought that they might betray us from the start, I will show an unnatural attitude."

“Sigh…”

It was a bit unexpected, and Regis sighed.

Altina noticed and asked:

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing, I just feel that you have grown.”

“I-Is that so? Where? Which part?”

Altina’s cheeks blushed, and she flicked her hair and placed her hand over her chest discreetly.

Regis gritted his teeth and said with a serious face:

“... If it was the old you, you will definitely say angrily ‘I will hide my suspicion carefully!’”

“Eh…”

“But if it is the current Altina, you won’t need to duel with Sir Jerome in order to improve your command relationship with him.”

In the past, Altina challenged the former commander Jerome to a duel in order to become the de facto commander of the Beilschmidt border regiment.

She won back then, but now…

If she was good with negotiations and socializing, there would be other ways to resolve that.

Altina pouted.

“T-That’s not true, the duel was necessary! I knew my strength from the very start, I won’t act like a stubborn child putting on a front!”

“Really? If Sir Jerome rode his horse and used his lance for the duel, how would you handle it?”

“Eh? Erm… I already knew from his personality that he wouldn’t do that!”

“Hmmm… You didn’t say ‘I will win even if that happens!’, you certainly have grown.”

“Y-You…”

Regis seemed to have overdid it, as Altina’s eyes became watery.

So he smile wryly and said:

“… Isn’t that great… You are just fifteen, you won’t be qualified to be the Empress if you don’t grow further.”

“I’m not qualified? I can’t do it?”

“Not right now… But people will grow. To be a qualified Empress, there are many things you have to learn.”

“Okay.”

“… Regrettably, to become a ruler, learning how to doubt others is necessary.”

“No problem. If doubting others makes me unhappy, I will read a poem by the window to change my mood.”

“That’s true.”

She was royalty by birth. She should be enjoying a peaceful life. But she abandoned her life of luxury, and committed herself to the battlefield to fulfill her dreams. Being too suspicious would hold her back instead.

Altina went back to the topic.

“You stopped Jerome from cutting off the High Britania Army that was escaping Chaineboule because of your distrust of the Second Army, is that right?”

“… Yes, and also, I am not very confident that we would win.”

“The enemy has about 15,000 soldiers right?”

“Even though the Seventh Imperial Army are mostly infantry, they still numbered 20,000, but were powerless before the enemies’ 10,000

men.”

“That’s true. We only have 16,000 men, and quite a number are injured.”

“In terms of training, the Seventh Army is stronger. After taking all this into consideration, I feel that it would be too difficult for Sir Jerome to intercept the supply unit. And winning might not be a good thing.”

“What do you mean?”

“... After this war is over, we will be struggling against Prince Latreille for the throne. If the army that is supporting us suffers huge losses, it would be bad.”

Altina frowned.

“Instead of that, shouldn’t we prioritize the defence of the Empire?”

“... ‘Those who can’t see what will happen in a thousand years have no right to discuss politics’, Mr Villoresi wrote that in his history book ‘Tipoly's Rampart’. He thinks that if you can’t consider a problem a thousand years later right now, you are not qualified to be a leader of a nation.”

“But, if the nation is falls, there won’t be a future for everyone.”

“... Even so, we still need to treat both sides equally. It is the privilege of the people to give up on ‘prioritizing the present’. If the leaders of a nation abuse this privilege, the nation will fall a thousand years later. And when it falls, there would still be plenty of people alive then. The nation will need to take responsibility for these citizens in the future.”

“Ugh… A thousand years later?”

“Well, in contrary to this saying, there will be people who think ‘this problem will not be relevant a thousand later’. But of course, the time frame can also apply to tomorrow, next year, next decade or next century.”

“What if it was a choice between today or the future?”

“... If the situation calls for us to discard one or another, that isn’t really a choice. Quoting a line from the book ‘Wall of Teebow’, ‘to drink poison today or tomorrow’. If one don’t have the resolve to choose, they can’t be a leader of a nation.”

“Is that so?”

“... Normally speaking, most people will choose to drink poison tomorrow. They will hold on to the hope that another choice will come up tomorrow.”

“That’s normal.”

“But people who place their hope on miracles are no different from gamblers and girls who daydream, and cannot shoulder the responsibility of guiding the people. Miracle won’t happen in reality, Prince Charming will never come, and only destruction awaits the nation.”

“It is wrong for a ruler to hope for a miracle.”

Altina nodded.

Regis asked:

“... Well then, what will you choose?”

Some other things were also written in the book.

If someone made the third choice of ‘not drinking poison today or tomorrow’, that person would be the least suitable to be a ruler. That would be unrealistic and unwilling to face the problem head on. Just a fool who didn’t even think about solving the issue.

These words that seemed to be idle chatting concealed Regis’ true thoughts.

Altina answered without a second thought.

“Cut down the guy who is asking about drinking poison, of course!”

She puffed her chest out and stood proudly.

Regis was stunned, and laughed the next instance.

“Hahaha… I see. As expected of Altina.”

“W-What is it? Is it weird?”

“… No, well, instead of strange… This is the right answer.”

She faced the problem head on and thought hard about how to handle it. Such an attitude was admirable.

Although her knowledge was lacking.

But Regis could give her hints to solve the problems.

Confidence filled his heart like never before. He had been bearing this burden since he became the strategist after all.

Altina said unhappily.

“What is so strange about this?”

“… Maybe the founding Emperor of Belgaria thought the same way when he built this Empire. We should use a strategy that matches the current era… That is why the battle tonight is most suitable for you.”

“That’s right! We just need to defeat the supply unit of High Britania! I can fight anytime! Even if my opponent is the Mercenary King!”

Altina stood up and said grandly.

Regis looked at the clock hung on the carriage.

“If the operation proceeds smoothly, we will begin the attack in four hours. Catch up on your sleep before that.”

“What about you?”

“I have to consider the things that will happen after this operation ends. Don’t worry, I will sleep tomorrow morning.”

“You are already certain that we will win?”

Regis smiled without saying anything.

Altina blinked her big ruby like eyes and jumped off the carriage with

a smile.

“See you later then, Regis!”

“Alright. We are in the middle of a war, be careful.”

“I know!”

She turned gracefully and left. Regis looked through the window and saw her figure disappear into the night.

Chapter 2 - Battle of West Lafressange

Yoosh, Franziska grabbed onto a branch and climbed up.

Her skirt was turned up, revealing her thighs.

The white skin was dyed red under the shine of the setting sun.

“I am back, big bro!”

“……”

Gilbert saw his sister, but he didn’t answer. Leaning on one of the thicker branches, he looked into the distance.

Franziska came to his side and shook the branch.

“Nyaa!”

“What an annoying girl.”

“What’s wrong with that!? Be happier to see your cute sister come back.”

“... Is there a cute sister here?”

“Me! That’s me! Your cute sister is me!”

“How annoying.”

Franziska didn’t seem to hear this complaint, and started humming.

She looked in the direction Gilbert was staring at.

She shaded her eyes from the dazzling sunset.

“Hmm~~ what are you looking at, big bro?”

“Nothing… I just have an ominous feeling about that place.”

“Huh? The west? Aren’t Oswald and the Second Prince fighting in the east?”

“Some of our allies are dangerous, but it’s a different kind of feeling.”

“The west, where the Second Army is located?”

“Now… Not anymore.”

Gilbert hid the unease in his heart and glanced at Franziska.

“Hyaa, the gaze that will even make a knight afraid, how lewd~~”

“Shut up idiot. The Fourth Princess you wound with your arrow is here. The Imperial 4th Army absorbed the Second Army, and numbers 16,000… That ‘Black Knight’ is there too.”

Franziska puffed her cheeks.

“Sigh… Really? Wasn’t she in the north east garrison unit? What is she doing here in the west?”

“Not just that, they even defeated the ‘Queen’s Navy’.”

“So what!? It has nothing to do with me!”

“According to intel, that strategist named Regis d’Auric was the acting Fleet Admiral. The man rumoured to have taken Fort Volks, who Oswald is wary about.”

“That’s why I was tasked to stop him.”

Franziska’s eyes started to waver.

She took on a mission earlier to attach Fort Volks along with the Varden Archduchy in order to stall the unit of the Fourth Princess.

But she didn’t even manage to delay her for a single night.

“Eh… Well…”

“Because of your failure, the operation to pursue the Imperial Seventh Army during the battle of Lafressange was hindered, and the supply ships were sunk. This made the war even harder. Because the High Britania forces were advancing too fast, the resupply of ammunition couldn’t keep up… We are the only supply unit left. If we can’t take the capital Versailles, this war would be our defeat.”

Franziska looked scared and broke out in cold sweat.

Gilbert sighed again.

“Sigh… If I knew he was such a dangerous fellow, I would have attacked Fort Volks personally. So Jessica’s intelligence isn’t that accurate after all.”

“Wouldn’t big sis feel pitiful if you say that?”

“In this world, only the winner will survive. It has nothing to do with effort or the position one is in. If you don’t want to die, then produce results. If you fail again, I will abandon you even if you are my sister.”

“Ugh… No problem! I will definitely win next time!”

“I hope so.”

Gilbert turned to the west once more.

Franziska wiped away her cold sweat in relief.

A shout could be heard from under the tree.

“Big bro ~~ Sis~~ Time for dinner—!”

A shrill female voice.

A ten years old child waved at the tree top. She was the third sister, Martina.

Looking down from the tall tree, she looked really small…

It’s because she was still young. She only reached Gilbert’s waist in height.

Franziska patted her face.

“Hey~~ That’s our Martina!”

“... She’s not strong enough yet… That’s why I make her help out in making food. But letting her accumulate experience by coming to the battlefield isn’t rushing her.”

“Erm— big bro? I’m saying that Martina is really cute!”

“I don’t care about boring stuff.”

“This is really important right!?”

Gilbert stretched his back and jumped from the tree branch.

The sound of the wind filled her ears.

The reactionary force almost knocked Franziska down.

“Hyaa! Wait for me big bro!”

Even if her body was as light as a cat, she couldn’t jump off from a tree this tall like that. Using her hands and feet, she slid down the tree nimbly.

Martina hugged Gilbert who just leapt off the tree.

“Brother! Dinner!”

“Okay…”

Martina hung off Gilbert’s body as if she was climbing a tree.

It didn’t bother Gilbert, and he left her be as he walked towards the camp.

The High Britania supply unit numbered about 10,000. Of that, 5,000 of them were escorts from the regular army, and 300 were the elites of ‘Renard Pendu’.

The members of the mercenary gathered immediately.

“Chief, please sit here!” “Ah, Chief, this way!” “Wait, it’s our turn this time right!?” “Hey, don’t squeeze in, I will kill you!?” “Fufu, want to have a go!?”

The Mercenary Group ‘Renard Pendu’ always had such an atmosphere, it was a gang of ruffians after all.

Gilbert sighed:

“Annoying… I should disband the Mercenary Group.”

The world turned silent for an instant.

But only for an instant.

“Hahahaha!” Everyone burst out laughing.

“Chief! This way! We have delicious grilled meat! It’s deer! Freshly caught deer!”

“Listen, this is my story…”

Normally, it was troublesome to make individual fires, so they would make one big bonfire. However, you couldn't really cook on it, so it was hard to make anything elaborate.

But they occupied an enemy campsite today.

This was a great stove, with lumps of meat grilling on it and a huge pot of soup besides it. A truly sumptuous dinner.

Because the incident that happened several days ago gave the soldiers heavy psychological pressure, Gilbert thought it was necessary to relieve them of their stress, so he used this chance to take out the wine from the supplies.

That incident was—

The soldiers in the unit saw the naval battle in Chaineboule harbour.

Gilbert thought the victory of High Britannia was a foregone conclusion, but he made preparation to leave with the supplies if things went wrong.

As the soldiers watched… A Britannian warship was blown to smithereens by an explosion so powerful that they had never seen it before.

The other warships lost their will to fight and surrendered one after another.

This dealt a major psychological blow to Gilbert and his subordinates.

Unlike spears and arrows, humans couldn't do anything about an explosion akin to a volcano eruption.

Time and wine were necessary to wipe away the fear.

At this time— the scouts saw the enemy units that were making camp. They were as timid as a mouse, fleeing in a panic before even fighting.

There wasn't any reason to not use this campsite.

After drinking some beer, both the regular soldiers and the transport personnel relaxed themselves.

The mercenaries were much happier than before because of this good luck. Specifically speaking, their yells were about 30% louder.

Or rather, they were getting too excited.

Even though he thought it was too noisy, Gilbert still found an empty seat and sat down.

Martina leaned onto his right shoulder.

Soon, a large bowl full of meat was served.

At this moment, Franziska walked over quietly.

“Wait! Big bro’s side belongs to me!”

Squeezing out the person beside Gilbert, she hogged Gilbert’s left.

Gilbert sighed.

“How annoying… Your body temperature is too high, give me some space.”

Franziska and Martina said at the same time:

“Don’t wanna!”

In the end, it didn’t matter where he sat. The mercenaries gathered around Gilbert with bowls filled with food, and talked with him without restrain.

“Listen to me chief! I got news from my hometown, my child has been born!”

“... That’s a cause for celebration, cheers!”

The mercenaries cheered and drank.

“Chief! My mother passed away! Can she go to heaven if I request the church to say a prayer for her?”

“Don’t worry about that. If she goes to hell, she would get to meet you, and you can be as filial as you like. Well, let’s cheers in the hope she goes to heaven anyway.”

Everyone clinked glasses in high spirits again.

“Chief! My wife just gave birth in my hometown too!”

“... Oh, cheers!”

“Speaking of which, I haven’t been home for two years.”

“I see… Isn’t it great the baby doesn’t look like you? Cheers!”

The men who seemed to be drowning in self loathe kept drinking.

Gilbert looked around him.

“By the way, where’s Jessica?”

“She’s praying again right?”

Franziska looked towards the large tent that was far away from the rowdy crowd.

That was the tent of the oldest of his little sisters, Jessica.

She was a ‘mage’.

She could bestow powers with chants, heal wounds, divine the future and control the weather— at least that’s how the mercenary group saw her.

She treated the mercenary group as her family too, but she disliked the crowds, and wouldn’t attend the occasional group dinner.

“What a helpless bunch…”

The gradually setting sun dyed the west of the hill in reddish blue, and the sky looked as if it was burning. Looking up at the dark part of the sky, the stars were visible.

* * *

Imperial Year 851 3rd June, Night—

The clattering of horse hooves could be heard in the dark.

Standing tall on the grass plain and kicking up dust, knights in black armour charged towards the enemy.

They were the Black Knight Corps of the Belgarian Fourth Imperial Army.

Leading the Corps were Jerome Jean de Beilschmidt, and his lance ‘Le Cheveu D’une Dame’.

Just as the name the ‘Black Knight’ implies, everyone wore black Armure de plaque (full plate armor) and rode on black horses.

Even the horses had armour that protected them from arrows and bullets.

In this era, horses were extravagant things.

Especially trained war horses, they were something most soldiers couldn’t obtain even if they worked their entire life, that’s how valuable they were.

That’s why attacking horses was rarely seen during melee combat.

Many soldiers didn’t care about the objective of the war, if they could defeat the opposing rider and seize his horse, they would obtain a fortune that could change their entire life.

No matter how powerful the enemy rider was, they were nothing in the mind of the soldiers who were thinking about nothing but the treasures they could seize. The armour on the horses was there to protect them from stray arrows and bullets.

The High Britannian had powerful rifles, it wasn’t clear how effective the equipment would be…

A guide who knew the local terrain well and had great night vision led the way with a piece of white cloth draped around him.

He lifted a hand to send a signal.

The enemy camp was nearby.

Under the starlight, the bonfire swerving in the wind was in plain sight.

“Hmmp… I will show you our strength!”

The sound of hooves erupted, and the High Britannian army noticed the enemy charging.

The sound of the new rifles could be heard from the camp.

It was still far. However, some of the shots hit, and the unlucky ones

fell off their horses.

Cavalry was overwhelmingly faster than infantry, but it was meaningless if the opponent had superior firepower. That's how good the enemy's rifles were.

When they were within range, Jerome gave the order.

"Fire!"

In place of the bugle call to signal a charge, Kruger who was besides him fired off his loaded musket.

The Belgarian muskets were frontloaded, and took a lot of time to reload. After getting a shot off, it would be placed into a basket hanging from the horse immediately, and another musket would be taken out to fire.

The Second Imperial Army had plenty of muskets, so it was possible to perform such a tactic with these muskets.

They lost one hundred cavalry in the battle of Lafressange last time.

But even if they were sitting on the shaky back of a horse, with each rider armed with four muskets, they could still achieve some results.

Not just bullets, flaming arrows were also sent flying at them.

Even so, the horses wouldn't be spooked…

Bang! The surroundings lit up suddenly.

Fire spread on the ground.

Jerome clicked his tongue.

"They spilled oil here!"

This was probably the instruction of the Mercenary King Gilbert.

The High Britannian army didn't have much battle experience. The sinister plan of spilling oil around the campsite and igniting it with fire arrows could only be done by seasoned veterans.

The quantity wasn't much, just enough to illuminate the surrounding…

But that’s where the problem was.

Kruger shouted.

“General! Our position is exposed!”

There wasn’t any meaning in the night raid anymore.

Jerome ordered:

“Enough! Retreat!”

After receiving the order, Abidal Evra and his subordinates sounded the bugles.

The cavalry stopped their charge immediately, but didn’t turn back hastily. The leading units turned to the right, the ones bearing shields on the left faced the enemy, then fell back.

In preparations for this moment, they had already conserved the stamina of the horses earlier.

They pulled away from the enemy as swiftly as the wind.

The sound of the High Britannian gunfire grew distant.

Jerome pulled the reins and the horse slowed. Abidal Evra approached him at this moment.

“How many wounded.”

Right now, Jerome was the commander of the Fourth Imperial Army Black Knight Corps. But many of his subordinates addressed him as ‘general’ out of habit.

Because they address the present general as princess, there was no confusion.

Jerome passed down the instructions:

“Don’t need to push yourself, it’s fine to go slow. Those who aren’t wounded hurry back to base and prepare for the next attack.”

“Understood!”

* * *

Just at the edge of his vision—

A white figure appeared in the hills cloaked in darkness.

A wagon!”

“Shoosh!”

Jerome signalled, warning those behind him not to run into each other. Amidst the neighs of the horses, Abidal Evra used his bugle to order the knights to slow down.

The Black Knight Corps slowed down and trotted past the wagon.

The wagon was ferrying plenty of buckets filled with water.

It was the pioneers.

Jerome could vaguely see them saluting in the dark.

He returned the salute, even though the gesture might not be seen.

“… Will this method really work?”

Abidal Evra muttered softly.

“Who knows. But if we assault them without any plans, even the cavalries would need to have the resolve to take heavy losses. Even though it is night and the range is far, some men were still hit…”

During the battle of Lafressange, they launched an assault at the rear of the enemy formation and still lost a hundred men. The danger of charging at the High Britanian new rifle formation head on was obvious.

Jerome spurred his horse on.

“Seems that the way battles will be fought is going to change.”

“I see.”

Abidal Evra answered in a trembling voice.

Before the debut of the new rifles, the cavalry that roamed the battlefield was nearly an invincible existence.

With speed unmatched by others and clad in armour impervious to blades and arrows, on horseback, one could easily stab at the enemy with a lance.

No matter how great an infantry unit was, it was common to see the tides turn when the cavalry was committed to the battlefield.

But now, infantries without expensive horses or armour, and with minimal training could defeat a rider with a pull of the trigger.

Even though it was night, the hail of bullets kept them from closing in. Just a little bit of oil and fire arrows could drive the cover of darkness away.

— Can they really defeat the supply unit?

Not just Jerome, many of the knights probably bore the same doubt.

That might be so, but the operations had begun.

They were already doing what they could.

After a 30 minutes trek, they reached the base camp.

It was actually not that far away from the enemy base.

Even though the battle plan necessitated it, it was a bold move to set up camp here.

A bonfire lit up the campsite. As heavy armour infantry secured the borders, the horses were placed in the center for rest, and the muskets were reloaded.

There were plenty of barrels here. After the empty wagon returned, barrels were loaded up before they set off again.

After Jerome's Black Knights' returned, they rushed the soldiers tending to the horses and reloaded the guns, trying to ready their horses and muskets for the next assault.

A man alighted from a white carriage decorated with extravagant

glass.

And approached slowly. He was the strategist behind the battle plan —Regis.

“… Thank you for your hard work.”

“Hmmp, I only made a trip to peek at the enemy. Leaving the horse aside, I’m not tired at all.”

“That’s great… There’s still quite a bit of time before dawn, I am worried about not being able to keep the harassment attacks up.”

“Is there any meaning in doing this?”

Jerome glanced at the pile of barrels.

Regis scratched his head.

“Part of this was dependent on the weather, so it’s hard to say… But if the weather maintains until morning, it should be able to work.”

“If it really works, that will really be magical.”

“Even if you say that… this is actually just natural sciences.”

“Hmmp… Speaking of magic… I heard the Mercenary King has a ‘mage’ subordinate too.”

“Ah, I heard such rumours before. It is said that Gilbert’s younger sister Jessica had the ability to bestow power, heal injuries and predict the future.”

“What do you think?”

“It’s a big world, so there are all kind of mysteries. Maybe someone like that does exist, just like mythology.”

He seemed really happy to say that.

Jerome reached out and ruffled Regis’ black and green hair.

“We are fighting soldiers bestowed with magical powers!? Do you understand what this means!?”

“Wahh…”

“Isn’t there any countermeasures!?”

“Ahh, actually, there’s no need to put that into consideration.”

“What do you mean?”

Jerome let go of the hand that was grabbing Regis’ hair.

Regis tidied his hair troublingly. It wasn’t very messy, but he seemed really conscious about being neat.

“… Ahh, really… If I don’t tidy my hair and clothes, Altina will be angry again.”

“Who cares.”

“Ahh… How mean…”

“Why is the princess so strict about your appearance?”

“Maybe she’s worried that the soldiers will feel uneasy if the strategist is too unkempt.”

“If you know that, you should learn to use a sword.”

“Hahaha… I couldn’t even cut an onion with a sword, it would be meaningless if the soldiers learned this.”

“You are saying that so shamelessly! You are a soldier too, at least take part in the morning training!”

“… You are right… If I have enough time to sleep at night, I will consider it.”

Regis was so busy because he was a strategist in the midst of war. However, Jerome dismissing all the admin officers in the past also played a part.

We lack manpower. From the scale of the Fourth Army, at least two hundred admin officers would be needed.

Speaking of which, the number of female admin officers had increased. Auguste’s maid named Lilim had exemplary performance,

so she was entrusted with a lot of tasks.

“You said earlier that there is no need to worry about the mage, why is that?”

“... Even if the sister of the Mercenary King is a mage, she won’t be able to see through my plans. When we fought the High Britannians in Chaineboule city, the Mercenary King was already there.”

“Yes, that’s true.”

“In that case, her spells are limited… For example, something to the effect of praying in a church. As mercenaries are not recognized by the church, she is actually just an idol to calm the spirits of the troops.”

Mercenaries were poor and couldn’t donate to the church.

If life was hard, they will even moonlight as robbers.

To the mercenaries, the church only existed for kings, nobles, farmers and merchants.

In order to provide his subordinates with spiritual guidance, it wasn’t too farfetched for the Mercenary King Gilbert to hail his sister as a mage.

“I see… Indeed, there isn’t any need to worry about this.”

“... In order to soothe the fears of the soldiers if anything unexpected happens, such a strategy is necessary. It was dangerous for a group be paranoid.”

“Hmmp! If a soldier shows cowardice on the battlefield, I will bring his head back to the Empire.”

“N-No, don’t do that! There are less than a thousand soldiers from Beilschmidt Border Regiment. If you say that, you will frighten the new soldiers!”

“Tch, how boring!”

Jerome fell into deep thought—

Before he was renowned as a hero, Jerome was a baron with 500 cavalry and 1000 infantry.

When he was transferred to the north borders to command Sierck Fortress, he built the Beilschmidt Border Regiment, and had 3000 men under his command.

In the three years after, be it the number of troops, scale of battle and budget, none of that increased significantly.

It was the same after Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria came, she didn't bring about any major changes.

Everything started after the weak youth before him— Regis arrived.

Subduing the barbarians in the forest, taking Fort Volks as the new base, and used the ransom for the prisoners of war to increase the soldier count to 6000.

And after the battle with High Britania, he negotiated with the Field Marshal Latreille and founded the Fourth Army.

After absorbing the Second Army, the scale of the forces now numbered 16,000.

The forces weren't completely under his control, but the forces still increased by leaps and bounds…

In just half a year, their forces increased by more than 5 times.

Jerome said slowly:

"Well, we have a wizard here too. Let's tell the troops that to calm them down."

Regis replied cautiously:

".... Erm, really… That's not how it is."

"Hmmp… To achieve victory, I will use anything available, that's all to it."

"... Erm, erm..."

As they were still discussing about this, the sound of hooves came from the darkness.

Another unit had returned.

Formed with the knights of the Second Army as its core and reinforced by mercenaries. The Crescent Knight Corps, named after its crescent emblem.

Their footsteps sounded heavy.

From the glow of the bonfire, it appeared that many of them were hurt.

A lot of medics rushed over in order to attend to the wounded, and the campsite turned rowdy.

The Crescent Knights conducted a night raid just like the Black Knights, armed with four muskets just like them, and pulled back after firing their shots. But the casualties they suffered were much more serious than the Black Knights.

Jerome snorted.

“Hmmp, wussies.”

“I did expect that casualties might be that serious… As expected, the battle is hard.”

“The enemy spilled oil around their base. They then lit it up with fire arrows, illuminating the area and exposing our position.”

Regis sighed.

“Ah, I see… So they used such a trick.”

“We fell into their trap.”

“... That’s right. We sent scouts in advance, but the opponent also disguised their action of spilling oil, pretending to be throwing out rubbish as they did so… It can’t be discerned from a distance.”

“Did they predict that there would be a night raid?”

“... After they seized the site, they set up camp there. It is a place surrounded by hills and hard to defend. It can be seen as a trap. I considered that they would be on their guard because of the terrain, that’s why I asked you all to retreat immediately after firing.”

“There are plenty of fools who refuse to listen to advice. They probably are eager to seize merits. That’s the reason why the Second army were defeated in the first battle.”

The Belgaria Empire was strong.

As such, they needed brave generals more than cautious officers.

And from now on, this trend will also change. Even though Jerome didn’t want to accept this…

Regis shrugged.

“... It can’t be helped, I will have a good talk with Benjamin later. It is about time for the Black Knights to move out.”

“What about the spilled oil?”

“Ahh, just fire at the ground with flame arrows some distance away. You can ignite the oil before hand. Then strike a while later, after the oil has burned out.”

“Hmm…”

Regis proposed a tactic matter of factly. Did he come up with it in such a short time? —Jerome sighed in his heart.

No, this was probably in the content of a book he happened to have read.

Even if this wasn’t so, he wouldn’t utter such compliments. Jerome wasn’t someone like that.

“Ah, also… The enemy should have noticed our long distance harassment strategy. They might set up ambushes near their base.”

“So we just need to be alert about this right?”

“That’s true, scouts are already observing them. If they set up

ambushes, we should hear the news."

As he said that, Regis took out a map.

Turning towards the bonfire, the map in his hands was illuminated.

He marked some spots on the preplanned route.

"... Point A here and point B here have scouts. The lantern they are hanging is still lit, meaning there are no ambushes. If the light goes out, that means there is an ambush."

"So you even prepared this."

For a moment like this, the prepared light signal could only be seen in one direction. It was definitely dangerous to lit a light in a night battle. The Knight Corps needed the resolve to risk their life just to draw near.

Jerome returned to his unit.

He rushed back in order to issue his orders as soon as possible.

"We are moving out! Abidal Evra, your team will bring fire arrows! Kruger's unit bring muskets! Hurry it up! Don't give the enemy the chance to catch their breath!"

The members of the Black Knights answered in unison:

"Understood!"

* * *

Gilbert was shifting crates.

He could move three crates that couldn't be moved by one person alone.

"Phew…"

The mercenaries rushed over in a panic.

"Chief?! Just give the word, we will help…"

“If you have the time to talk about that, then move the other crates. Place food and clothes around the gunpowder crates. If a stray bullet or something hit this, it will explode.”

“Y-Yes!”

The mercenaries started carrying the boxes in a hurry.

Franziska walked over with a rifle in hand.

“Big bro, the oil had been spilled!”

“Oh… But the enemy ain’t fools, it probably won’t be of much use.”

“They probably know about shooting flame arrows from a distance to burn off the oil. But that’s why we prepared torches.”

They used this tactic before, and Franziska was already used to it.

This was something Gilbert and his brothers in arms learned on the battlefield.

War was a teacher.

Compared the brightness of burning oil, the torches weren’t bright enough to satisfy the condition to fire at targets.

But the enemy won’t be able to advance if the flames were still burning, so it could buy some time.

“There is still four hours until sunrise, the enemy is probably scheming to wear us out.”

“How about setting off now?”

“No. If we travel through the night and don’t catch up with sleep in the morning, we will collapse from exhaustion. There’s no need to discuss anything further.”

Even if they could set off in the morning, it would be impossible to not rest at all.

He expected a night raid, but not a nonstop harassment tactic like this.

The enemy didn’t want to engage in a shoot out.

The Belgaria Empire’s cavalry were strong.

Maybe they were waiting for the chance for an all out charge.

“As expected, he is a stubborn foe.”

“Who?”

“The fourth Princess… Or rather, that strategist.”

“Regis huh? I think I saw him before.”

“What kind of guy is he?”

“A weak fellow who looked as if he will fall from just a shove.”

“... Is such a guy really a soldier?”

“Who knows? The Princess is good though. Well, I am better! Duke Balzac is a powerful adversary!”

“I heard the current head is weak?”

“He is strong, but he doesn’t want to kill people! I don’t understand.”

“I see… Maybe he is a guy like me who hates to kill.”

“Eh? Big bro?”

“What, you think I am a happy mass murderer?”

“N-Not really…”

Franziska opened her eyes wide.

Gilbert piled the crate he was carrying around the gunpowder crates.

The mercenaries and regulars worked together to shift the provisions and clothes.

After they were done, it would not explode unless a direct hit was scored.

He sweated a lot.

“Phew… I hate killing people. But killing others is better than dying. I'm not a religious person at all.”

“Well, that’s true.”

Gilbert surveyed the campsite.

Gilbert caught sight of a figure moving in the darkness. That was probably a scout of the Belgarians.

The corner of Gilbert’s lips rose.

“… Well then, let the killing begin.”

“Yes!”

Franziska answered happily.

Gilbert returned to the base in light attire. His hard working sister tagged along to help.

And took the trident he had always used in his hand.

The familiar feeling didn’t change.

There was still four hours until the break of dawn…

In accordance to Gilbert’s command, about a thousand men left the base with rifles and torches. Instead of an ambush, it was more like an invitation to the enemy.

They made no effort to conceal themselves, and were attracting the attention of the enemy prominently.

They took up formation to the west of the camp.

After the unit set off and eliminated the Belgarian scouts—

Gilbert also left the base with twenty of his underlings.

The Black Knights headed for the camp in the dark once again.

The vegetation was thick in the hilly region, and their vision was

blocked from time to time.

Starlight couldn't penetrate through the branches and devilish shadows seemed to be lurking everywhere.

Jerome frowned and recalled the map in his mind.

— There should be a signal here.

He searched for light from a lantern.

Nothing.

There wasn't anything.

He could see the camp fire in the distance.

Pulling on his reins, Jerome slowed his horse down.

The knights behind him started watching the surroundings, looking for any ambushes. This was part of their training.

Jerome felt something was off.

"… Tch."

A bad feeling.

Below—

He didn't see anything, but using his instincts, Jerome pulled on the reins and changed the strides of the horse.

The horse then moved beautifully, leaping high as if its body weight was gone.

Did the horse see it too? Or was it instinct just like Jerome?

In any case, he successfully avoided something at his feet.

Like Jerome, the horses behind also jumped.

But some of the soldiers were slow to react.

One of the horses behind didn't lift its hooves in time. It then fell forward. Something could be seen, and was obvious to any who saw

it.

A rope was laid out!

The large warhorses tripped and threw the knight wearing heavy armour to the front.

The sound of metal colliding rang out.

Followed by a muffled groan.

Even if they succeeded in avoiding the rope, there were many soldiers who stepped on their brethren on the ground and fell.

They inspected the area before the battle, so there shouldn't have been any traps.

Or did they set up these traps in the short period of time after the first night raid?

— Had they see through our actions?

Or was it a spy?

The one planning the battle was Regis, and he only told Jerome the content before he set off.

The only ones who knew were him and Jerome.

No, the scouts responsible for surveillance should also know.

If the lantern was out, it meant there were ambushes.

Could it be…

"The scouts were taken out?"

If so, the opponent who was capable of setting up this trap won't be satisfied with just tripping a few riders over.

Jerome stopped the noise behind him and listened for the enemy.

— Back left!?

Sound of many sets of footsteps.

Turning back, the enemy hiding in the shadow of the trees and tugging on the black tripping ropes dashed out.

For the element of surprise, the enemy didn't ride horses. But they were faster than hunting hounds.

"Enemy!"

Jerome pulled the reins with his left hand to change the direction the horse was facing. Holding the lance with his right hand, he faced to the left, reacting speedily.

And the enemy should be some distance away…

One of his foes closed in with unbelievable speed and thrust his trident.

"Haha— ! So you are the Black Knight!?"

"… Tch! The Mercenary King!?"

The blade of the trident pressed forth dangerously.

It knocked Jerome's 'Le Cheveu D'une Dame' loose.

He estimated that there was no time to grab it with his right hand, so he held the lance with his left hand and barely defended the blow.

The Mercenary King smiled in the darkness.

"Amazing! You actually blocked that!"

"Sneak attack like an unscrupulous rat. Mercenary King? More like Mercenary rat!"

"I don't care about that! I didn't come up with it!"

The enemy was just Gilbert and fifteen of his subordinates.

The ones who fended off the knight who came to reinforce Jerome were probably the men from the 'Renard Pendu' Mercenary group.

Jerome turned and charged at the Mercenary King.

"Fu… I always wanted to fight you. Let me see if you are as

powerful as the legend says! Yahhh—”

Changing his grip, Jerome thrust the lance with his right hand.

Jerome, the famed ‘Black Knight’ thrust his lance consecutively.

Be it the young knights of Varden Archduchy or the commander of the White Wolves Knights, none of them could withstand his attacks.

But not only did Gilbert dodge them, he even counter attacked.

Jerome’s eyes widen.

— *He can spare the effort to counter attack!?*

Jerome twisted his body to evade the trident strike at his chest.

A screeching sound accompanied the sparks flying off the black armour.

But he wasn’t just taking a beating one sidedly.

Jerome thrust a second time.

The blade of the dark lance flew towards his adversary’s throat—

Gilbert parried the blade with a shake of his left hand.

The lance glazed the shoulder and was deflected skywards.

He actually fended it off.

Gilbert’s eyes glowed.

“As expected of the Black Knight! You avoided my trident’s strike! This has never happened before!”

“Hmmp… You are the first one to live under my lance. Instead of a mercenary, you are closer to an acrobat.”

“How long can you keep your composure? It won’t be so slow next time!”

“En Garde!”

Gilbert’s trident thrust was riposte by Jerome’s lance.

Gilbert retracted his trident with haste and fended off the counterattack. He stabbed at the thigh this time.

— *I will give you the leg!*

Jerome didn't defend his leg and went for the opponent's head.

When both weapons were about to hit—

Gilbert leapt out of the way.

And laughed heartily.

"Hahaha! You really are a dark knight! Zero hesitation in exchanging your leg for the opponent's head!"

"Hmmp… I admit this level of sacrifice is necessary in order to stab you."

"Haha, I understand… Black Knight, it's been fun clashing with you! But the terms offered by High Britania isn't good enough."

Mercenaries fought for money, and will increase the price according to the ability of the opponent.

Jerome steadied his breathing.

"Compensation worthy of your life huh. I will negotiate with your employer by using your coffin!"

"Alright… Time for the tide to subside."

Gilbert lifted one hand to signal, and the mercenaries of 'Renard Pendu' fighting the other knights started to pull back.

After that, Gilbert then turned and retreated.

When Gilbert withdrew some distance away, one of the knights charged forth.

"Trying to run!?"

It was Captain Kruger.

He thrust his lance out.

“Hey! Do not pursue!”

Jerome tried to stop him, but Kruger didn’t seem to hear.

“If he escapes unscathed after attacking the general, it would tarnish the name of the Black Knights!”

His lance was blocked by Gilbert.

But Kruger used the slight advantage in range and attacked again with a turn skillfully.

Gilbert gritted his teeth.

“… No choice… Black Knight, you actually sent your subordinate to help you.”

It wasn’t clear what he meant.

After that—

Sound of rifle reports rung out from the forest.

Kruger who was pursuing the enemy fell off the horse just like that.

The Black Knights drew their muskets out to retaliate.

Numerous shots could be heard.

But the ‘Renard Pendu’ mercenaries led by Gilbert were already gone, covered by the woods.

Jerome jumped off his horse and rushed to Kruger’s side.

“Hey!”

He flipped Kruger over.

Kruger’s eyes were losing their light.

Blood spew from his mouth.

“… Ugh… General…”

Three bullet holes could be seen on the armure de plaque’s thick breastplate.

It probably hit his organs.

What a well planned trap—

Capture the scouts and interrogate them for intelligence. Pull the tripwire to isolate the leading elements, and then attack the commander directly. If they fail to capture him, the snipers in the forest will fire when the enemy stops.

— That was the ambush of the Mercenary King.

If Kruger didn't charge ahead, Jerome might have been the one to be hit.

Jerome gritted his teeth and carried Kruger on his shoulder.

"Stop kidding me! If you sleep in a place like this, I will leave you behind! Kruger, don't sleep, I order you!"

"... I… can't… see… anything…"

"Pull yourself together!"

"... I… want to be… just like the general…"

Those were his last words.

Jerome stood still.

"Damn it!"

* * *

The Black Knights suffered some losses, but they still completed their mission successfully.

After dealing a major blow to the enemy's special forces, they retreated before reaching the enemy camp. As expected, the enemy only opened fire in close proximity to their camp.

They then returned to base—

Now was the time to mourn their lost brethren.

Chaplains gave the last rites to the corpses covered in cloth and placed them side by side.

Regis leaned against a crate as he watched this scene.

No one complained about the battle plan. However, he still wondered about the lives that were lost because of his command. Regis' felt as if there was lead in his stomach.

He sighed plenty of times.

The Crescent Knights prepared to move out after resting for a moment.

Benjamin rode alongside his brother Jestin.

Regis already advised them about the mistake of getting too close to the enemy base which resulted in serious losses, they probably won't do that again.

There weren't any generals that could replace them, so he could only hope that they would change their ways.

The neighing of the horses, clanking of the armour, sound of muskets being loaded and the sighs of the troops…

The scouts moved out ahead of the Crescent Knights on carriages.

According to Jerome's report— the first wave of scouts had probably been captured, and the route of travel had most likely been leaked.

Scouts hiding in the dark forest were discovered that easily.

As expected of the Mercenary group 'Renard Pendu'...

The task had become more dangerous. But it was impossible for the units to move out without scouts. Assigning replacement scouts was necessary.

Regis felt frustrated.

The casualty count was more serious than expected…

He didn’t expect such losses from both the scouts and the cavalry.

— Even though he was aware that the knowledge and measures in books couldn’t be transferred so easily into real life battles.

The one who came up with a plan that would definitely result in casualties was Regis.

Regis felt chilly.

After seeing off the replacement scouts, Regis felt ten years older.

His frail body was as heavy as lead. He couldn’t lift a finger, and breathing was difficult.

Only his heart was beating abnormally fast, he could even feel his pulse clearly.

The weather wasn’t hot but he kept sweating, wetting his eyelashes and soaking his back.

We have taken huge losses…

Will this plan really work?

Is it worth betting everything on it?

Isn’t there a more stable plan that will have fewer losses?

Am I wrong?

“You don’t look well! What happened Regis? Hungry?”

These sudden words surprised him.

It was Altina in light armour. She offered the potato in her right hand.

“It’s a critical time, so you can’t sleep, but at least eat something alright? It will be bad if you faint from hunger.”

“... Ah… I don’t feel like eating.”

“If you fall, who will take over command?”

There’s Altina and Jerome— But wouldn’t that mean he was giving

up his responsibility if he said that? Regis thought.

“You are right, I will have some.”

“Yes!”

Altina smiled brilliantly.

Regis took the potato.

“Hot! Hot! This is too hot!”

“Of course. It’s freshly baked potato! It tastes better if you eat it hot right?”

Regis tossed the hot potato between his left and right hand, trying to cool it down without burning his hands.

“W-Why are you fine when you hold such a hot potato?”

“Why are you so weak? Normally, after food like potato is cooked, you will put it into the soup with your hands right?”

There is a stove here, there should be plenty of ways to prepare food, why are you only using it to bake them?

“... I always used to read when I ate since I was young. As I had a book in my hands…I would place things like potatoes in a bowl and eat them slowly.”

He would dirty the books if he used his hands, so he always ate with a fork. He still did this whenever he ate alone.

“Wouldn’t it turn cold?”

“... Burning my tongue and lips would be worse.”

“Eating them hot is the most delicious right!? Regis is so strange!”

Altina laughed happily.

Regis could only smile wryly.

— Ah, I smiled.

His heart felt heavy and stuffy earlier, but he felt more relaxed now.

Altina came over and sat on the crate.

They sat side by side.

They were so close that their shoulders would touch if they moved just a little. The bonfire illuminated her profile— Regis felt a little nervous.

She was four years younger than him and just fifteen years of age, so why was she so beautiful?

Regis averted his gaze.

She was the fourth princess of the Belgarian Empire, the commander he was serving. He had to make their status and relationship clear.

“Altina, are you ready? There is still some time before day break.”

“I’m probably too excited and can’t sleep.”

“... It’s the eve of the decisive battle after all.”

“Hey Regis, are you worried about something? Your face doesn’t look good.”

“... I am worried about the battle of course.”

“I don’t mean that… Hmm, I won’t ask if you don’t want to talk about it.”

Altina changed a little too— Regis thought.

In the beginning, she was a kind person with a strong sense of justice.

And right now, Regis could feel empathy from her.

Her personality was straightforward, but she became more prudent. She had really grown.

If not, she would pester Regis like a child even if he was busy.

He took a bite out of the potato in his hand.

As expected, It was still hot.

He chewed as he sorted out his thoughts.

“... Things I’m worried about… Because of me, a lot of people died… That feels really heavy.”

“That can’t be helped, it’s a war after all. Many lives are lost, be it for the winner or loser, plenty of innocent people died. No matter how kind, how hardworking and how much a person loved another, they still killed in cold blood.”

“Ah, I understand that.”

“That’s why, I want to be the Empress to eliminate wars. After I become the Empress, I will create a nation that will live in harmony with others.”

“Yes.”

“For example, the Kingdom of High Britania. If we had better relations with them, there wouldn’t be any wars.”

“Here’s what I think… the Belgaria Empire has been at war with its neighbours all this while. If there is a sudden call for peace… It will earn the wrath of other countries instead.”

“... What a realistic topic… And it had been proven by history. There are differences between each individual, even more so for nations. ‘Men won’t forget about a grudge’ — Just like the buildings that survived a fire, the fire might seem to be out, but there might still be hot spots, and will they will flare up when the chance arises. Examples of war breaking out again between nations in a ceasefire are a dime a dozen.”

“Then, is it impossible to eliminate war?”

“... If peace lasts long enough, for example our grandchildren or great grandchildren, then it might be possible… People will all die one day. We might not be able to eliminate grudges, but our descendents can’t inherit grudges. If peace can last indefinitely— the

grudges might then be buried in history.”

“What if the fathers tell their son and grandson that ‘the Belgaria Empire is the enemy’, and educate them that way?”

“... Education is important. But grudges are a type of emotion, and education is information. Even with such prejudice, if they grow up in a peaceful environment, they won’t hate the Belgaria Empire that seriously.”

“Is that so…”

“There are differences between people, but the stand a country takes tends to lean towards the attitude of the majority. War won’t break out even if a minority have a cause for hatred. Even if the countries are trying to get the best for their national interest… There is still a lot of room for negotiation.”

Altina nodded seriously.

Even if two groups were on opposing factions, they should talk it out instead of resolving it through war.

That was her objective.

“If war keeps going on, the grudges from both sides would continue.”

“Ah, we need to start the change somewhere… If we can’t do it, the nation will perish… No, the nations that don’t choose peace will perish. If we keep waging war, there will be a day when we will lose.”

“I, want to change this country. And create a nation where no one will have to die because of war.”

“Yes.”

“To accomplish this, we have to overcome the danger before us.”

“... I understand.”

“Regis, I know it’s painful to think about it this way… But instead of those who have passed on, we should think about those still living.”

As if he just woke up from a dream, Regis looked around him.

He imagined the mourning figures of the soldiers dying and joining their brethrens. He realized that no matter how knowledgeable one was, it had nothing to do with their emotions.

Regis took a deep breath.

The weight of fatigue and guilt that was suppressing his thoughts became slightly lighter.

"... Thank you, I'm fine now."

"Is that so? I don't know what happened, but it's great to see Regis becoming energetic."

"... Well I am absorbed in self reproach, the damage might be growing bigger."

"Because of the Mercenary King?"

"... The possibility is high. I sent out a lot of scouts, so it couldn't be helped if there are more sacrifices… After that, the Black Knights were ambushed and we lost about ten riders, including one captain."

Altina nodded silently.

From the body language of her subordinates, it wasn't hard to imagine that there were many casualties.

"Despite all that, is the battle operation going smoothly?"

"... It's going smoothly… I learned from the local soldiers that the wind and temperature are ideal. We are moving according to plan… The actions of the enemy are still within expectation."

There were 16,000 men in the Fourth Imperial Army, but the ones harassing the enemy were just the 400 men from the two Knights Corps. The ones preparing food, tending to the wounded, caring for the horses and preparing the muskets were 2,000 men.

The objective of the Knights Corps attack was to stall the enemy army in place, leaving them unable to move.

They still needed to travel 50Li (222km), and couldn't set off without proper preparations as they still needed to transport the supplies.

With the night raids occupying them, they could only focus on the base defences and couldn't spread out their forces to guard the surroundings.

That's why we are giving up on our defenses, only allocating the minimum security forces and assigning the other troops to perform a certain task.

Altina looked to the east.

The sky was still dark with stars, just what was she looking at?

There were still a couple of hours before dawn…

The Black Knights and Crescent Knights gathered together and made preparations for the assault.

The plan to stop the enemy from leaving was completed.

Soon, the sky will lit up.

Regis looked towards the flag in the basecamp.

The wind was weak.

But the drooping flag seemed exceptionally beautiful.

A man walked to him over the grass.

And made a sloppy salute.

"It seems to be working, Mr Strategist."

"… Ah, Mr Ferdinand, thank you for your hard work."

The one who came was the captain of the pioneers— Ferdinand Stuttgart.

Although his fatigue was apparent after working through the night, he had a satisfied expression.

"The temperature is higher this morning and the wind is weak. It's

great that it keeps evaporating!”

“... Yes, it’s very ideal.”

“A massive project and committing 12,000 men. If it works, this will be something we can boast about to even our grandchildren. Thank you very much, Mr Strategist.”

“No such thing… I should be thanking you, the plan can’t be executed without Ferdinand… It was the same with the attack on Fort Volks, you have been a big help.”

When they were attacking Fort Volks, work men with excellent arm strength were needed to dig the tunnel.

After taking the Fort, the pioneers were tasked with refurbishing the Fort, and the results in fending off the attack by Varden Archduchy were fantastic.

“Originally, pioneers will just perform menial task like making stoves and setting up tents. At the most, we will just build bridges.”

“Well, that’s normal.”

“It was a surprise when we dug tunnels and fired off explosives in the attack of the fort… But that was nothing compared to the job this time.”

“It was written in the books, but such a large scale project has never been done before, I still feel uneasy about it… But we finally made it work.”

“It’s turning white.”

“Yes.”

“This isn’t the place or season for strong winds, the plan is a success!”

“... In the capital, the outside would sometimes be foggy when I open the windows. But this is a significant difference, as it’s the first time I’ve see something like this.”

“Me too.”

The sunlight illuminated the surroundings.

But with their vision obscured by a white foggy world, they couldn't see the clearing even with the bonfire.

It turned foggy.

After one night, a lot of water was splashed in the vicinity, and the water level of the lake had dropped significantly.

There are many types of naturally occurring fogs—

Including radiation fog.[W]

During the night, the heat from the ground escape into the atmosphere, a phenomenon known as radiation cooling[W].

This radiation phenomenon will cool the surface of the ground drastically.

The air contains a certain amount of moisture (water in gaseous state), and with the drop in temperature, its concentration would increase.

When the temperature drops to a certain level, the saturated water vapor would condense into water droplets.

The tiny amount of water droplets in the air forms the fog.

Fog tends to form on land without wind, and in valleys and basins. This gave rise to the terms, inland fog, valley fog and basin fog.

And the hills of West Lafressange was an inland basin, and the wind was very weak right now.

It hadn't rained these past few days, so it was hard for fog to form. However, by splashing large amounts of water onto the ground, it will fulfil the conditions for fog to arise.

That's why this place was chosen for the battle.

By the way, such phenomenons was known as fog when close to the

ground, and clouds when up in the sky.

The small floating droplets will combine with the droplets around them to form even larger droplets, before finally falling from the sky in the form of rain.

All these phenomenons were written in academic books after research by scientists.

There were some reports on small scale experiments to create man made fog.

If the enemy couldn't see, then the range advantage of the new rifles would be negated. They might still be powerful, but they were nothing to be afraid of if they couldn't hit.

Even if the supply unit set off now, it couldn't leave this hilly region faster than the cavalry.

The darkness could be repelled by bonfires, such as by spilling oil onto the ground and lighting it with fire arrows.

But it wasn't easy to get rid of the fog.

Regis narrowed his eyes as he watched this white foggy world.

"... Well then… time to end this."

Chapter 3 - Mercenary King Gilbert

Imperial Year 851, 4th June, Morning.

The sound of the horse hooves sounded out on the grass plain.

The wheels turned loudly.

The blacksmith Enzo sat cross legged on the luggage platform. Before him was a coffin like wooden crate.

Inside it was the Grand Tonnerre Quatre, entrusted to him by Princess Argentina.

Sitting besides Enzo on the bumpy carriage was his disciple Lionel who was making a zipper.

He first secured the material used for the zipper, hammered it, then carved out the shape of the zipper with a chisel.

The old man in brown robes they met in the town earlier was sleeping soundly because of the fatigue of his journey.

Enzo opened the curtain covering the carriage and looked outside.

It was completely white outside.

The sun should have risen, but they couldn't see far at all.

But they finally met up with the horseman who visited him earlier.

The weather was foggy.

He turned back to the horseman, who seemed to be smiling gently. He was just a short distance away, but Enzo could only make out his vague silhouette. Dense white fog was all around him.

"Wah, it's really foggy."

"That's right."

Enzo nodded.

The driver shrugged.

"I can't tell the directions this way."

"Hahaha… if we stay on the main road, it will be fine.I am confident in my sense of direction."

The horseman leading the way waited on the spot marked on the map by Regis, his mission was to escort Enzo to the army base camp.

If the base camp changed location, there would probably be a different horseman.

At this moment— The horseman muttered:

"There wasn't any rain last night right? Fog tends to form as the wind is weak here, but there wasn't much rain these few days."

This seemed to have spurred Lionel's interest, and he leaned forth.

"There are places where it is easier for fog to form?"

"Of course. This region might be hilly, but it is surrounded by mountain ranges, so there isn't much wind. The ground is soft and doesn't drain water easily. If it rains… Well, even if it did rain a little, it still feels weird."

"It didn't rain?"

"What is this? Why are there patches of wet and dry ground…"

The sound of the hooves differs because of the grounds it trotted on. The solid sound of dry ground and the cushy smack of wetlands alternate every now and then.

The wheels were turning noisily on dry soil just moments ago, but now it sounded as if it was rolling over a wet ditch.

The ground was really strange.

Lionel said cheerfully:

"It's like someone went out of their way to spill water all over the ground!"

The driver and the horseman laughed heartily and looked around them.

There wasn't any wind, and the white fog obscured their vision. They couldn't see much further ahead, even though there should be plenty of hills around them.

If the weather was clear, they could even see the mountain peaks in the distance.

Was an amount of water equivalent to rainfall in this region spilled onto the ground?

The horseman tilted his head.

Enzo couldn't understand either.

“Spill water onto the ground? Who would do that, and why?”

“Erm, no, I was just kidding.”

Lionel said with a laugh.

Enzo shrugged.

“Hahaha…” The horseman relaxed and laughed too.

“Halt! That carriage there! Which unit are you from!?”

Someone asked in High Britanian.

The horseman who was leading the way with a smile turned pale instantly.

The figures of infantry appeared gradually in the dense fog.

Less than twenty paces away.

About ten of them.

Among them was a knight in full plate mounted on horseback.

Which meant that they were sentries.

They didn’t have any flags, but from the language they spoke, they were from the High Britannian army.

The driver asked in a trembling voice.

“… Boss, what should we do?”

Enzo was just a blacksmith, and didn’t know what he should do if he ran into an enemy sentry.

The only one they could rely on was the horseman leading the way…

And they were in despair because they knew that. The face of the horseman looked worse than the driver.

They probably couldn’t escape.

If the enemy opened fire at them, everyone would definitely die.

After defeating the horseman leading the way , the heavily armoured knight will catch up if the carriage tried to escape.

On the carriage, neither Enzo, his disciple, the driver nor the old man had any means to resist them.

— Should they surrender?

Impossible. There was no way the High Britannians would let them off after seeing the sword inside the crate.

“... I’m sorry… It’s all because of me. I chose to take the main road because of the heavy fog… We should have taken a detour.”

“No, that’s…”

“... Please run away. The main base should be 5Li (22km) from here. I will hold that knight off.”

He placed his hand on the hilt of his sword.

He didn’t cower despite knowing that death was imminent, a truly brave man. It’s probably because of the burden he was shouldering.

The High Britannians closed in with their rifles.

Enzo tapped the shoulder of the driver, and whispered:

“... The moment he draws his sword, we will run.”

But the enemy stopped just a dozen step away, and aimed their rifles.

They were still some distance away, and the High Britannian heavy armoured knight shouted in Belgarian:

“Get out of the carriage right now! The driver too! Do it now or we will shoot!”

The situation changed…

They didn’t even give the horseman any chance to stall for time!

If the horseman charged out now, he would be killed immediately. And he can’t even turn and run now.

Enzo’s left hand was trembling.

It was an unredeemable error, he couldn’t even breath.

— Maybe we should charge together with the horseman, we might break through when they open fire.

At this moment, one man alighted from the side of the carriage.

His brown robes were fluttering in the wind.

The old man who was sleeping soundly in the luggage compartment was walking towards the High Britannians soldiers leisurely.

“Who can sleep well when there are talks of opening fire.”

The other party shouted in Belgarian:

“Who are you!?”

“As you can see, I am an old man. You are a big guy, you wouldn’t be scared of an old man right?”

The elderly man shrugged.

He was still five paces away from the High Britannians.

“Take your hands out of your robes!”

“Ah, no problem.”

He took off his brown robes and tossed it to the ground.

He was of medium built and hunching his back like a kid. He was undoubtedly an old man.

A piece of linen which could be found anywhere in Belgaria or in any other nation was tied around his waist. There was a plain longsword hanging there.

The heavily armoured knight demanded:

“Throw the sword away!”

“You are afraid of an old man that much? Your subordinates will

laugh at you.”

“Want to eat lead!?”

Unfortunately, the opponent was cautious.

The old man shrugged, and took the sword from his waist.

“Alright, alright… This is just cheap stuff… Something I got from my great grandfather… fooled you.”

He threw the sword out.

Up high.

Just where did his arm power come from, the longsword spinned into the sky.

Enzo looked at the sword.

High Britannian soldiers did the same.

The sword disappeared in the grey fog.

Kacha…

That was the sound of something cracking.

— What happened?

They turned their gaze back in a hurry. The old man who was five paces away just now was gone.

“Ah…”

The sound akin to a strangled chicken was made by the heavily armoured High Britannian knight.

Behind him was the old man.

He was like a boy grabbing on to a man from behind.

He was grabbing the helmet of the knight with both hands.

The head then twisted in an impossible angle,

He broke the neck!?

After making sounds that seemed impossible for humans, the heavily armoured knight died with blood spewing from his mouth.

The old man sneered.

“... This old one’s name is Baltasar Basil De Balzac! An ancient clan who were bestowed a sword by the L’Empereur Flamme!”

The elderly man drew the sword from the waist of the dead knight.

It was a beautiful silver sword crafted from the new generation of steel.

The blade was thinner than others. Broader swords were more fashionable in Belgaria recently, while this thin sword was similar in shape to those made fifty years ago. Maybe this type of sword was the rage in High Britannia right now.

“... Hmm, not a bad sword, I will be borrowing this.”

Baltasar’s figure disappeared.

And couldn’t be found anywhere.

The old man who was supposed to be sitting on the back of the horse flew without any preparatory movement.

He suddenly approached the soldiers holding rifles, who screamed in response.

Blood splattered everywhere.

Their captain was killed, another was down before they could even say his name. He was like a ghost.

“Kill him! Shoot!”

A soldier shouted in High Britannian.

Gunshots sounded out.

But at such close distance and without any cover, the rifle didn’t have any advantage.

And their opponent was Baltasar who was moving beyond the limits of humans.

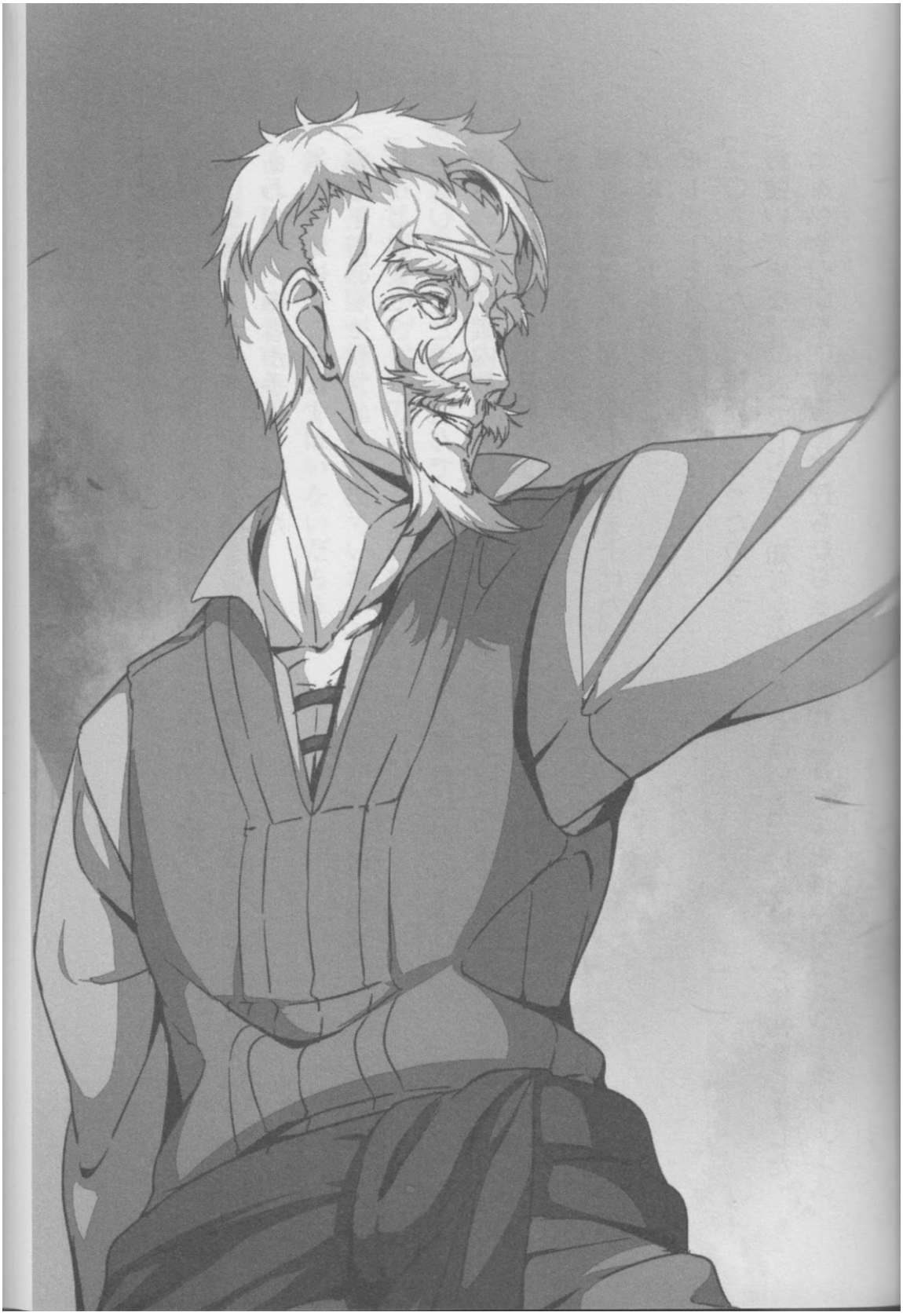
It was no longer a battle, but a one sided massacre.

They couldn’t keep up with his movement. Blood splashed wherever his sword touched, and the enemy soldiers fell.

In an instant, all of them were dead.

After glancing at the corpses on the ground, Baltasar threw the sword he took away.

The sword made from the new type of steel had many chips. It had cut through the armor of plenty of soldiers after all.



That wasn’t something that could be done with normal arm power.

He picked up the sword and robes he tossed aside before the

battle.

“What are you all standing around for? More enemy will come after hearing the gunshots, get the carriage moving quick.”

The driver waved his whip in a hurry.

Enzo reached out his hand.

“Old gentleman!”

“Yosh.”

He grabbed the hand tightly and climbed onto the luggage compartment of the carriage.

The horseman led the way.

“We are going off the main road and taking a detour! Please follow me!”

“Please do so!”

After the driver said that, both of them sped up.

Baltasar sat down.

“Huff— huff” He panted.

“I won’t be able to handle it if there are twenty of them.”

“You are amazing, Lord Duke. We didn’t know who you were back then, please forgive us if we did anything that offended you.”

Enzo lowered his head, and Baltasar waved his hands.

“No no, I only said that to attract their attention. I am just an old man you can find anywhere.”

* * *

In the fog—

Warhorses trotted.

The sound of the hooves were earth shaking, threatening to break open the dense fog.

The pride of the Fourth Imperial Army, the 400 Black Knights, 500 Crescent Knights, and a hundred light armoured riders made up to a thousand men.

Around them were 10,000 infantry.

Before charging out of the fog, there was a need to confirm if the enemy had left their base.

It was impossible to move without making any sound in the fog.

It was clear from the sound.

Leaving the soldiers aside, it was impossible for the wagons to not make any sound.

The carriages creaked as they moved through the plains.

Scouts tracked the movement of the enemy in the fog, and reported it back to the cavalry.

Jerome was at the head of the unit.

Besides him was Abidal Evra.

“According to the scout reports, the enemy are holding their position!”

“Good! All units, attack!”

After receiving the orders, his knights sounded the warhorn.

“Move out!”

Just as they planned, twenty riders formed a group, and there were four groups here. They set off one after another.

They took out the equipment that had already been tied with ropes, and threw it onto the ground.

One end of it was tied to pieces of wood.

It made clanging sounds.

This was a tool to disrupt the hearing of the opponent.

Under the cover of the sound, the cavalry surrounded the camp, making it hard for the enemy to grasp their position.

Sound of gunfire came from the fog.

It was far.

— *The enemy won't be able to see us,* he told his riders earlier on.

Even the Mercenary King would find this unexpected situation hard to handle.

Jerome gave the word:

"First wave, go!"

"Ohhhh—!"

Angry voices rang out, and the Crescent Knights started charging.

The cavalry started firing from far away.

But compared to the intimidation they did last night, they were much closer.

The High Britannians started fighting back.

But the Crescent Knights didn't charge in a straight line, but in a curved line.

The retaliatory bullets hit empty air.

If it was night, they could see the armour's reflection of the starlight or bonfire. The place could be lit by fire arrows, so they could still see something.

But it's different this time.

In the dense fog, such a counterattack was nothing— Jerome suppressed the amazement in his heart.

But despite all this, the enemy stayed put with the supplies. They couldn't leave their resources behind and run, and it was too late to load it up the carts now.

The High Britannian army couldn't move.

And so, both sides sought each other's position in the heavy fog as they fought, since the situation applied to both parties.

Because the enemy only dared to defend their position by using the range advantage of their weapons, the Imperials had the chance to deploy their forces in a superior position.

The enemy focused their counter attack on the Crescent Knights.

Jerome waved his lance.

"— Black Knights, charge!"

They didn't increase their pace.

Instead, they moved quietly, controlling the pace of their warhorse, as they closed in carefully.

The gunshots were getting nearer.

If the fog dispersed at this instance—

The murderous High Britannians will point their rifles this way.

It was still too far away.

Too far for lances, but close enough for bullets to pierce the thickest armour.

The best distance for rifles.

Jerome eased his horse forward, as if he was reviewing his troops.

The other riders was breaking out in cold sweat.

Their concerns were clear.

— Isn't the noise from the knights supporting their advance too soft?

The attack of the Crescent Knights are too shabby.

Will the enemy realize that is a diversion after failing to hit anything?

All these scenarios were scary.

Unease.

This was the fear of the unknown and death.

As if they were swimming in a white world.

At this moment, they saw a black figure.

A High Britannian shield soldier— before he even processed this fact, Jerome squeezed the stomach of the horse.

And shouted.

“Charge—!”

The vanguard started charging like the wind.

The enemy camp that appeared in the fog was just twenty paces away.

For a warhorse charging at full stride, that distance was covered in just a blink of an eye.

The shield bearing soldier opened his eyes wide and wailed:

“It’s the enemy!!”

“Woaahhhh—!”

Jerome thrust his lance ‘Le Cheveu D’une Dame’ at the large shield.

The frame of the shield was made from metal, but most of it was wood. If thin steel was the main component, it would be useless for defense. If it was made thick enough to withstand swords and pikes, it would be too heavy to wield properly.

And wooden boards would be enough to fend off the attack of a horseman.

But the soldier defending the thrust didn’t expect the quality of the lance, the speed, and the arm power to be so different from normal troops.

The shield shattered in an instant, wood fragments flew everywhere.

The lance broke the shield and pierced the soldier’s body.

Followed by a scream accompanied with spewing blood.

“Ehhhh!?”

“Warrghhh—! Those who want to die, come at me!”

He flung the pierced soldier aside.

The soldier landed heavily, spilling blood everywhere.

“Open fire! Rifle units! This way!”

An order that captures the style of the High Britannians perfectly. Soldiers with the guns turned their horses and aimed their rifles.

"Too slow!!"

Jerome thrust his treasured lance.

He knocked aside the rifle aimed at him and opened a huge hole in the enemy soldier’s chest.

At this moment— The cavalry had broken through the makeshift fences of the camp, and defeated the enemy soldiers one after another.

The cavalry that broke through the lines were massacring the High Britannian forces.

Civilians who were tasked with transporting the goods were trembling on their carts.

If they were Belgarian citizens, they would pick up arms and fight since they were trained.

This was a huge difference between the relatively peaceful High Britannians and the Belgarian Empire that had been fighting wars

continuously for a few hundred years.

Even if the soldiers with rifles could hit the knights at close range, they would be cut down before they could reload.

The knights suffered insignificant casualties before the soldiers that didn't receive rigorous training.

The stage was set.

Abidal Evra rode over on his horse.

"The enemy is fleeing!"

The enemy soldiers threw their rifles away, stepped over the fences they built themselves and ran faster than the Imperials.

Jerome sneered.

"It's fine, leave them to the Crescent Knights and infantry."

"Yes Sir!"

The High Britannians seemed to have forgotten that their enemy was an army of 16,000. Even if they were able to escape from the cavalry in the camp, they would still be surrounded by the Belgarian army.

Jerome was bothered by something else.

"Hey, did you see Gilbert?"

"The Mercenary King!? Ah, no…"

There was no sign of the Mercenary King.

The ones fighting were the regular troops of the High Britannians.

"Tch, he escaped… Maybe not…"

Jerome pulled on his reins and turned the horse around.

"Hey, Abidal Evra, take the cavalry and continue sweeping up the remnants of the enemy, try to secure the supplies. But if they resist too fiercely, burn them along with the supplies."

“Understood! Erm, what about you, General?”

“I’m heading back to base! Hey, watch out for guys who are taking their time walking!”

After saying that to the knights around him, Jerome headed back to base.

He seemed to be faster than when he was charging at the enemy.

Jerome gritted his teeth.

“I won’t allow you to die in a place like this!”

* * *

They might need to move at a moment’s notice, so the camp equipment such as tents had already been packed.

The flag flying over the base was a simple one. Altina brought the tables and chairs out of the tent.

Regis stared at the map laid out on the table.

He moved the pieces according to the scouting reports, keeping on top of the development. Even so, they were some distance away from the frontlines, so the reports were a bit slow.

They were about 1Li (4km) away from the enemy camp.

In order to keep in contact with the scouts as fast as possible to grasp the situation of the battle, they were positioned as close to the battlefield as possible.

But if they were too close, enemy soldiers roaming in the fog might run into them.

It would be terrible if a large amount of fleeing enemy bumped into them.

Even though the Belgarian soldiers were well trained, the rifle and shield tactic of the High Britannian was a big threat.

Even the Seventh Army that was proficient in melee combat was decimated by the enemy.

And it was impossible to issue strategic commands. It was meaningless if the soldiers couldn't receive the orders.

Even though the range of the rifles didn't matter too much in the fog, it will still expose the headquarters to danger.

Altina held her wrist in disappointment and looked towards the fog.

When Regis suggested that Altina should guard the base, he thought that he would be rejected.

"If it is for the good of the army, I will endure it even if I have to stay in the base."

She said with an unhappy expression, but still agreed.

Maybe Altina learned that she should respect the duty that everyone is tasked with.

If she could understand this, this would be a pleasant growth of character.

Sound of gunfire rang out from the fog occasionally.

They were actually quite a distance away from the battlefield, it was hard to hear the hooves of the horses and the angry shouts of the soldiers.

Altina pouted.

"Eh… Regis, can we move the base closer?"

"... No. At a time like this, there is a high chance of running into an enemy unit that got separated from the main forces. With most of our forces deployed out, that would be dangerous."

"That's true huh."

In order to win by numbers, a large number of troops were placed around the base.

It was guarded by 5,000 infantry.

The rest of the forces were sent out to attack. 10,000 infantry surrounded the enemy base. Light armoured knights and the Crescent Knights feigning the attack numbered 600, the Black Knights had 400 riders.

They suffered losses the previous night, so the actual numbers were lower.

A messenger came before Regis and reported the situation.

“— That’s all!”

Regis moved the pieces on the map again according to the message.

The information conveyed at this moment was that the Black Knight is charging at the enemy camp.

The feign by the Crescent Knights seemed to have worked.

“… Hmmm… Please hand this to Lord Benjamin.”

“Yes Sir!”

Regis handed an order decree to the messenger, who placed it inside a bamboo tube on his back before setting off.

He scanned the map once again.

There weren’t any weak points.

The battle was proceeding smoothly.

“Hmm…”

“What is it, Regis?”

Altina asked as he was moaning.

“… Nothing, it’s going great.”

“Isn’t that good?”

“That’s right.”

“Something wrong”

“Eh? Could it be… It’s nothing, just that they are being too docile even though the Mercenary King is in command. I thought they might realize the intention behind the feign and launch an attack.”

“Why do you think so?”

“Even in the fog, the enemy should be able to tell the feign attack units were not attacking straight on. If so, they should be expecting an attack from another angle.”

“Wouldn’t the fog be meaningless then?”

“… No… the rifle units won’t be able to see clearly, so they are less likely to score a hit. Leaving that aside, it should be simple to deduce that the Imperial army isn’t in front of them, right?”

“Hmmm?”

“Well then… The enemy will gradually draw away from the unit feigning attacks right? They are being attacked repeatedly in that place after all.”

“Ah, true.”

“… So the situation I was expecting was… After attacking the Crescent Knights for a while, the High Britannians will withdraw to the supply carts and retreat.”

This was the strategy Regis came up with.

They won’t have any other choice after escaping from the fog. They can only surrender.

It would be unwise to stubbornly defend the base even though a chaotic battle was imminent.

Altina tilted her head.

“They would be able to escape if they keep running in a direction without any enemy!?”

“… It is impossible to cover such a large distance at full sprint. When they are exhausted, the infantry deployed there can wait at leisure while the enemy labors.”[W]

Regis pointed at the red pieces on the map.

Altina was enlightened, and said:

“Ah, I see.”

“Even if they want to escape, there is a large number of enemy waiting for them… In that case, the best way to reduce casualty would be to surrender.”

“Isn’t a chaotic battle avoidable in the fog?”

“The shield and rifle tactic is heavily reliant on tight formation. In a chaotic battle, the Belgarian army would be stronger.”

“I understand!”

“Well, that might be so, but prolonged battle will increase casualty. Even though the enemy might be considering surrender, but before the Black Knights charge in, they didn’t move at all.”

“What if the enemy base is no longer there?”

“The fog might be heavy, but it would be hard to imagine 10,000 enemy soldiers sneaking past our groups of scouts…”

He didn’t deny the possibility though.

But the fog couldn’t conceal the noise.

The sound would be loud in close proximity, and would drop drastically with distance.

It didn’t feel reliable.

Even if that was the case, it was impossible to miss the sound of many of the carriages moving.

“… Hmmm… Impossible. If they could do that, it would be a more amazing invention than the new type of rifle.”

Just by walking with another horse, the sound would be transmitted through the ground even if it wasn't transmitted via air.

And the horses have scents, which meant that they could smell them.

Altina looked westward.

"But it was different than expected right?"

"... That's normal. The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry. After all, it's an adversary we never fought before."

"That's true, it's common to see that the person is different from the rumours."

"Hmm… If I missed something…"

Regis looked at the map.

Altina turned her head and gasped.

"Regis! An unknown carriage is coming from behind!"

"Eh!?"

The guards noticed shortly after and panicked.

They raised their pikes and yelled: "Halt!"

It was a large carriage.

Approaching side by side were two horseman.

They were the soldiers sent to guide the way.

"It's me! I brought Mr Blacksmith with me!"

A large bearded man with a physique similar to a bear appeared and waved his hands.

"I am a blacksmith! Here to deliver a package for Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria!"

"Brother-in-law Enzo!"

Regis stood up and walked towards the carriage.

Altina followed right behind.

“Our guest is on that carriage! Clear a path!”

The soldiers in the defending camp made way slowly, like the gates of a city.

After keeping their pikes, the soldiers on guard saluted.

The carriage came slowly from the west and drove slowly into the base camp.

The rider leading the way at the very front dismounted besides Altina.

“I have brought Mr Blacksmith with me!”

“Sorry for the wait!”

One of them was the horseman waiting in the east. The other was a horseman who stayed behind at the old base when they shifted last night. His task was to lead the Blacksmith to the new base.

They completed their mission splendidly.

Altina replied “Thank you very much.” and the horsemen finally relaxed their expression.

They treated the carriage more cautiously, and stopped it further away.

On top of the hill, the flag marking the base camp was erected in the middle, while Altina’s chair and the table for battle plans were placed on the side.

A short distance away was a place for meals, equipment repairs, treatment of the wounded and for the shift workers to rest.

Five hundred infantry protected the heart of the base at all times.

On the outer layer were one thousand men formed into teams of tens.

The carriage was stopped in the middle of the rear defence units.

Under the watchful eyes of the soldiers, the Blacksmith Enzo alighted from the carriage.

He looked tired, and it was easy to tell how hard his journey was from his face and gait.

Enzo bowed respectfully.

“Your Highness, I have brought your item with me!”

“My deepest gratitude! It must be difficult to make a delivery to the dangerous battle field!”

“It is a sword after all. How can you do without it on the warfront. I am concerned about that, so…”

“Can I open it now?”

“Yes please.”

Altina walked towards the carriage.

Regis nodded at Enzo.

“I gave you much trouble… It will be great if the war ends soon…”

Enzo looked around him, and said in a volume the soldiers around him won’t be able to hear:

“... How goes the war? Will it affect Rouen city?”

“... As far as I can tell, there’s no need to worry.”

“Rouen city is very close to the capital right? I asked my wife to take the kids and seek refuge in my old hometown. It’s further to the north.”

“... Did sister seek refuge?”

“Erm, no. She insisted that ‘it will be fine to leave it to the Princess and Regis’. Well, the Empire won’t fail, so my worries are unfounded.”

“... Although we are trying to even the score after the devastating defeat earlier… Anyway, the war will end soon, it will be fine if the First Imperial Army doesn’t mess up.”

As Enzo had a worried look on his face, Regis told him not to worry.

Regis and Altina walked side by side to the carriage.

When Altina reached the carriage first, she suddenly leaped back

“What!?”

“Hyaaa—!”

Someone flew out of the carriage!

The man was holding a sword.

And he slashed at Altina’s head.

No one could react in time.

But Altina responded swiftly. She drew the sword on her waist and blocked the blow.

Ding! A sharp sound echoed out.

The attack didn’t stop, and the man from the carriage started his second wave of attack.

“Hee! Hee! Hee!”

“Eh… Tch… Hah! Hyaaa!”

Altina wielded her sword nimbly, fending off the multiple attacks before countering from the side.

Her blade grazed the brown robes.

Both parties pulled away.

And closed in immediately—

Clasping their left hand.

“Isn’t this Baltasar! You actually came!”

“You are as good as ever, Argentina!”

Altina laughed happily, and the old man opposite her chuckled.

The soldiers around them were bracing their pikes moments ago, but now they looked at each other, wondering what happened.

Regis ran over.

“Could you be Duke Baltasar Basil de Balzac?”

“That’s me.”

The old man nodded loftily.

Altina held her sword with her right hand, and swung her left hand that was holding the old Duke’s hand like a kid.

Regis sighed.

“... Don’t do that… What if the guards thrust their pikes at you?”

“If I get to die by their pikes, it would be a fitting end.”

Altina nodded in agreement.

It’s troublesome even if you understand.

“... Princess, the troops are watching.”

“Ah, that’s right.”

Altina only noticed this now, and showed a serious expression as she sheathed her sword.

Baltasar kept his sword too.

Regis started explaining to the confused soldiers:

“Well… This is ex-Duke Baltasar. Everyone must have heard of him. He is the swordsmanship teacher of the Princess.”

The soldiers finally put away their pikes after understanding the situation.

House Baltasar achieved numerous merits as the right hand man of

the founding Emperor, a famous noble house that was bestowed with one of the treasure swords of the Empire. It was a given that the ex-Duke was qualified to teach the Princess swordsmanship.

The surprised Enzo sighed in relief.

“Hah… We were very worried during the fight with the enemy soldiers.”

“Kakaka! If my hands turn dull, I might lose my head.”

Baltasar seemed to be saying something casual, and Altina besides him also laughed. But it wasn’t a laughing matter.

The way these two thought were a bit different from others. Or were they muscle headed?

Regis couldn’t understand.

But the mission to make the delivery to the battlefield had been completed perfectly.

“What brings you to the west, Baltasar?”

“Nothing important. I just heard that Altina was troubled by some mercenary.”

“Eh!?”

Altina smiled wryly.

“You lost?”

“Well… Yes… To avoid a slash, my sword hit a tree, and the hilt was broken…”

“Whatever happened or broke doesn’t matter. Did you lose?”

“… Yes.”

Altina bit her lips vexingly and nodded.

Baltasar sighed deeply.

“Not good enough… The important thing isn’t the way you use your

sword. No matter how strong your opponent, how dire the situation, even if they have guns or anything else, you have to win. Losing in the battlefield means death. Everything is over if you die."

"I know… So I sent my sword for repairs."

She looked towards the carriage.

Enzo nodded.

"Bring it out."

Together with his disciple, he unloaded a crate that looked like a coffin.

The driver watched from behind the curtain.

The crate was sealed with many nails, and needed to be pulled out one by one.

Baltasar observed the crate curiously.

"Ohh, so you are the blacksmith who is repairing that sword."

"Yes. Will need to focus here… You too sir, to actually be the teacher of the Princess."

"Hmm! Not a teacher! But a friend! It's not teaching since it's like this."

Altina nodded.

"That's right, just someone I befriended through swordsmanship."

"This old one had never lost though!"

"Ehh!? But I won thrice!"

"I didn't lose!"

The old man said childishly.

Enzo finally pulled all the nails out.

"Well, in the blacksmithing world, you two would be fellow disciples."

“Haha…”

His disciple laughed wryly.

The crate was finally opened.

Regis planned it wonderfully.

What’s left would be taking the sword.

And wait for the battle results of Jerome’s knights.

Then sending news of the Fourth Army’s victory over the supply unit.

Be it the High Britannians or the First Imperial Army, after they receive this news…

The war will end.

Even if the High Britannians have new rifles and cannons, If the 40,000 men under Latreille’s command do not engage the enemy on the field, the fort wouldn’t fall in just half a month.

A gentle breeze caressed Regis’ forehead.

* * *

The God of Death struck in the dense fog, the first to fall were the sentries.

In the beginning, the soldiers around them didn’t understand what was happening.

It then became a one sided massacre without any resistance. All of them died without any last words.

The grass was covered in fresh blood. The headless soldiers stood there without even raising their pikes.

They probably didn’t even know how they died.

A man holding a giant trident appeared.

Men in black clothings then came out of the fog one after another.

The armour they wore and the weapons they wielded varied wildly. There were spears, swords, bows, scythe, bo and even unknown weapons.

The only thing they had in common was their black robes and the stench of blood.

The man with the trident said in a low voice.

“One man to take on a hundred… And open a bloody path!”

The group in black assaulted the soldiers before they even answered.

Belgarian soldiers weren’t weak.

“Enemy! It’s the mercenary… these guys…!!”

A soldiers picked up his pike to fight.

But his vision was filled by a large hammer.

“Wha!?”

“Warrgghhh—!!”

The thing that came as the screams of despair rung out was a hammer. It bent the pike and smashed into the face of that soldier.

His opponent was a large burly man wielding a giant hammer.

The pikes of the soldiers who engaged him all broke, and they backed away.

“What is with that guy…!? Just like a tornado…”

“We can’t retreat! The Princess is behind us! Stop them!”

“Damn it… Now is the time to show the honour of the Empire!”

The troops drew their swords and slashed at him.

But the swords snapped crisply into two, as if they were already

broken.

It was because of the strange shape of the large sword that cut them. the sword's blade was very wide at the tip and was curved.

Maybe it came from the east, just like High Britannia’s tea.

A slender man with slit like eyes surveyed the area, then yelled:

“Fufu… Haha—!! Hyaa!! Laa—!!”

He wielded a twisted sabre, which was surprisingly sharp.

It easily split the sword and pikes of the Imperial soldiers. Instead of the blade being sharp, it was the man’s arm power that was amazing.

Be it veins or bones, all of that would be cut in two like wheat stalks.

The Imperial soldiers fought on as if they didn’t realize the result of the melee combat had already been determined, until they were all defeated.

The one standing at the very front was a man with a trident.

The Mercenary King Gilbert Schweinzeberg.

He led the strongest mercenary group.

The three hundred elites of ‘Renard Pendu’ began their assault in the fog.

Their individual combat prowess was overwhelming, crushing the defence formation of the Imperials easily.

But the soldiers of the Empire wouldn’t retreat so easily.

Wars had been ongoing before the times of their great grandfather, all men were educated with the idea that they would be going to the battlefield one day.

At this moment the guards on the left of the base were engaging the mercenaries.

The Pikemen leader commanding ten soldiers charged at the burly

mercenary with his pike.

“We are the 19th Pikemen team!! Even in death, we will show the enemy our honour! Everyone, charge!”

“Ohhhh—!!”

“Roar!! Hyaa!!”

The mercenary cut down all the pikes, and took the heads of the Imperials with a follow up blow.

The soldiers behind thrust their pikes from the side of the dead soldiers.

“Die—!!”

“Guah!?”

The twisted sabre fell from his hands.

Two, then three pikes pierced his body.

The Pikemen leader shouted:

“Charge! Charge!”

The thrust of a spear changed direction.

One of the mercenaries thrust his spear into the Pikemen Leader’s stomach.

“Guaa!? Damn it—!!”

When he was hit, the leader released his pike. When he was dodging earlier, he was already prepared to die.

He just went and grabbed the spear of the enemy tightly.

“Long live the Belgaria Empire!”

“Hah!?”

The mercenary whose weapon was seized was surprised for a moment— He was then stabbed by numerous pikes.

No matter how strong the mercenary was, they only numbered three hundred.

If the battle was drawn out, the 5,000 Imperial soldiers wouldn't lose.

But when the army went through merger, the soldiers lacked training and the command system was still imperfect.

Of the 5,000 men, half of them were the old guards from Beilschmidt. The rest were the remnants of the Second Army, and private armies sent by the lords of various territories because of the state of emergency.

Among them were untrained recruits, retired soldiers, and even nobles who joined because of pride.

For the poorly trained soldiers, they already presented a huge weakness in the operation of the unit and the conveyance of information before their combat potential even comes into question.

Some didn't hear the orders correctly because they were too excited. Some made their own judgement based on their experience. There were soldiers who couldn't carry out their orders due to fear.

In the end—

The guards who were supposed to reinforce the crumbling defence units came too late.

The soldiers guarding the base camp had fallen.

The man with the trident was already before Altina.

They were just ten paces apart—

Just how many soldiers did he kill to reach this place.

A rain of blood seemed to have drenched the black robes as it was still dripping blood.

Pieces of meat still lingered on the trident in his hand.

The man showed a feral smile.

“I believe this is the first time we met, Princess of the Empire.”

“Trident… You must be the Mercenary King Gilbert Schweinzeberg.”

Altina drew the sword on her waist.

The guards were still locked in battle by four mercenaries with extraordinary arm power.

Regis finally realized his misstep.

“… How can this be.”

An unimaginable situation occurred, not only did it make him shiver, he couldn’t catch his breath either.

Breaking through the base camp guarded by 5,000 troops with less than a thousand men!

Gilbert said:

“Your Highness, how about a trade? Using the supplies in exchange for your life.”

“Weighing my life against the future of the Empire? Who will agree to this kind of deal?”

“This wench… I have to teach her a lesson.”

Altina was very loyal to the Empire.

Jerome won’t agree to this terms. But it would be hard to judge what the soldiers would do.

There were plenty of ways to inflict pain and despair to humans. If the Princess issued the orders after torture, it was highly possible that the troops would give the supplies back.

Regis cursed his own shallowness.

— When he made plans for the fog, he considered the possibility of the enemy trying to capture his commander.

That’s why he arranged for 5,000 troops to guard the base camp, just in case.

But it was broken through so easily!

He underestimated the ‘Renard Pendu’.

The problem was his misjudgement of the new unit’s combat potential.

Imperial soldiers were strong, but just lumping them together wasn’t enough to make them strong. Regis didn’t utilize the soldiers efficiently.

Even if he had to let the Second Army claim the victory of this battle alone, he should have assigned all the old guards from Beilschmidt to guard the base camp.

If Regis was proficient in martial arts, he would be able to tell that the new units were no match for the mercenary.

Gilbert shouldered his trident and approached nonchalantly.

“I have something to ask… I know that this isn’t the season for fogs. What did you do?”

Altina wiped away the sweat on her brow.

They were still facing off against each other, but she was under a lot of pressure.

“My strategist is a wizard.”

“Hmm? I see… I noticed on my way here that there are patches of wet grounds all over. Did you spill a lot of water? Was that the secret behind that magic?”

“You actually understand this much.”

“That explains the half assed night raid earlier. The purpose was just to pin us down at the camp site. It would have been disastrous if we discovered the units spilling water.”

“……”

Altina was silent.

She didn't affirm or deny. Gilbert nodded.

"What an impressive strategy. The strategist huh… Regis d'Auric right?"

He swept his eyes across everyone present.

First were the escorts around Altina, then Enzo's disciple besides the crates near the carriage, and finally Regis.

"That's you?"

"Ughh… Yes."

He heard Franziska's description before. Regis had a frail body unlike a soldier. Gilbert couldn't explain why he could identify him.

He laughed out loud.

"Hahaha! Really! You are Regis!?"

"Ugh…?"

"It is my utter defeat! The first time my perfect record had been tarnished! A guy who can create fog! As expected of a wizard!"

Instead of a compliment, it was closer to the mocking laugh of a devil.

Goosebumps.

Even though Regis felt breathless, he still replied with determination.

"… In order to stop this from happening, I planned so long… To stop the Mercenary King Gilbert from going near Her Highness. The one who failed is me."

"Ahh, I can understand. You thought the enemy couldn't break through if you had 5,000 men on defence right? Naive, war isn't determined by numbers!"

"… This fatal incident is because of the soldiers' lack of training."

"Lack of training? Wrong!"

“Huh?”

Gilbert span his trident.

And pointed it at Altina.

He watched this way with bloodshot eyes.

“The things that decides a battle has always been— Guts!”

Altina gripped her sword tight too.

“I feel the same! When I handed the task to Regis, I didn’t considered how the soldiers would think, so it’s my mistake. I’m too naive to think I can win with just numbers!”

“As expected of the Princess. Well then, I will claim the price you have to pay for your failings!”

“What nonsense are you saying? Mercenary King? The price is letting you show your face before me.”

“Hoo?”

“I am the Princess of the Belgarian Empire! Even though that’s not what I want to be!”

“Haha! Very brave. But I don’t mind crushing your arrogant pride and making you beg! I will tear off your skirt and nail you to a cross, Princess!”

“Disgusting!!”

Altina yelled.

Gilbert stamped on the ground and the grass shook in the shockwave as if there was an explosion.

And charged in with a speed that was hard to imagine.

The escorts wanted to protect Altina—

But were stopped by the four mercenaries nearby.

After shattering the pikes blocking his way, Gilbert moved before

Altina.

The sharp edge of the trident appeared before Altina's eyes.

She evaded by twisting her body.

"Is that all you got!?"

"Haha! You think you can dodge that easily!?"

Like a snake, the trident tracked Altina's body.

The path of the trident changed suddenly— which was impossible to do without extraordinary arm strength.

Altina parried with her sword.

"Take this!"

"Come get some!"

The trident was pulled back instantly. Before the fact it was pulled back even registered, it was thrust out again.

An ear piercing screech.

The trident was blocked again.

Any slower and her wrist would have been cut by the blade.

Gilbert roared:

"Faster! This is not playtime in summer!"

"Ugh!?"

It was impossible to tell how many thrusts there were.

Consecutive thrusts similar to Jerome, but the attacks were faster than him.

The intense sound of metal on mind as the sword creaked.

Regis was thinking.

This was his fault.

He was fine with any punishment that might be meted out to him.

But what he could do now was…

— Gilbert's objective was to capture Altina alive. There was no meaning in killing her.

If he did that, the only thing that awaited him would be 5,000 soldiers tearing him to shreds to avenge their commander.

He should only be thinking of capturing her alive.

Regis turned and looked:

"... It should be, no… I have to be sure."

He can't fail anymore.

At this moment, he said with certainty.

"Gilbert is aiming for the Princess' sword!"

"Oh, but even if you figure that out, what can you do!?"

Gilbert attacked fiercely as he shouted that out.

Altina was barely fending off the blows with her sword, and she also couldn't counter. But she had no intention of running.

She must be hanging on while gritting her teeth.

"Ughh…!!"

Even the unskilled Regis could tell her determination.

With her sights set on becoming the Empress, she couldn't turn tail and run before a mere mercenary.

Absolute faith in her martial skills—

Might ushered in a result that runs contrary to Gilbert's plan.

Altina's sword couldn't withstand the damage and shattered.

"What!? It broke so easily!?"

She could still dodge the attacks, but she lacked the means to defend against them.

Gilbert threw his head back in laughter.

“Haha! The blades of my trident is made from Tristei!”

“What did you say!?”

“Anyway… I will break one of your arms first!”

If she had to block a sweeping attack, Altina will lose her arm.

A fluttering brown robe barged in.

It was Baltasar.

After taking the heavy blow, he slid back a little.

“Ku~~ I see, he is strong.”

“What!? Baltasar!?”

“Altina… What you should be holding isn’t that thin sword right? The blacksmith is waiting for you.”

“B-But… the one on one duel…”

Now wasn’t the time to hesitate.

Regis ran over.

And reached Altina’s side.

Within range of Gilbert’s attack.

“Altina!”

“Regis!? You can’t use a sword, what are you doing here! You can’t even defeat a hamster right!?”

What cruel words.

Baltasar might be guarding the front, but it made Regis’ knees weak just thinking about being in range of the Mercenary King’s trident.

But he can’t run away alone.

Suppressing the fear in his heart, he said:

“I-I came to convince you… Is your goal to become a sword saint? Or the Empress to lead the people?”

“Huh!? To be the Empress of course!”

“Then, instead of losing properly as a swordsman, you should prioritize the victory of the nation correct?”

“Ughh!?”

Now wasn’t the time to answer.

Gilbert wielded his trident.

“Get out of the way old man! Go cuddle a cat or whatever!”

“Tch!”

When he was facing Altina, he held back 30% in order to not kill her by accident.

Right now, his repeated attacks seemed to be landing at the same time.

But Baltasar blocked them all as if he already knew where they would land.

Using this chance, he closed in on Gilbert.

“Hah! How joyous! Aside from the dark knight, there is someone who can block my attacks! And so old too!”

“Why you! With such refined skills, what are you doing as a mercenary!? Shouldn’t you be a knight and defend your country!?”

“My country… Is my mercenary group! I will protect them! Don’t think that I will listen to your lectures! I won’t let the Princess escape!”

A powerful strike.

Baltasar blocked it, but was knocked onto the ground because the force was too powerful.

He couldn't get up.

He tried to calm his ragged breathing.

And smiled:

"Such… Such a pity… If I was twenty years younger."

His right arm holding the sword was bent in the other direction.

A fracture!?

Gilbert swung his trident again.

At this moment—

Altina shouted.

"58th Pikemen team, go to the enemy's back! 59th to 80th Pikemen team, don't let the other Mercenaries come near!"

The soldiers fighting chaotically reformed ranks after hearing her orders.

Altina walked forth from amongst the soldiers with their raised pikes.

In her hands was a new sword.

Gilbert twisted his mouth.

"Ho? You're afraid of dying now? Fourth Princess of the Empire, you were just talking about a proper one on one duel earlier."

"Because of my personality, I am concerned about the battle over there."

"Of course. War is all about men killing each other."

"If I am not concerned… I don't think the soldiers will raise their shields in battle."

Altina dropped her giant sheath.

And drew her sword

Unlike the sword that broke days ago, this one had a much thicker hilt.

The large hilt was as heavy as a hammer.

The design was simple, and all the parts were one size thicker.

According to the blacksmith Enzo, the material used was completely different, so the sword was much heavier and harder.

The blade had been polished, making it smoother with a silver glitter.

It was reflective enough that one could count Altina's eyelashes off it.

She turned to the enemy.

"I won't lose. I am not aiming to be a swordsman, but the Empress, so I definitely won't lose… So be seeking help to buy time, repairing this sword or listening to the advice of my strategist, I will do everything needed of me."

Gilbert shrugged.

"Isn't winning a one on one duel the condition for becoming a commander?"

"I will ask my troops about that later— After I defeat you!"

Altina charged forth.

Thrusting her huge sword.

Even though they were some distance away, there were pikemen standing by behind Gilbert.

Gilbert couldn't retreat.

And engaged with his trident.

The new 'Grand Tonnerre Quatre' clashed with Gilbert's trident—

The trident creaked under the pressure.

Even though it was made with tristei, that was only for the blade of the trident.

Gilbert gritted his teeth.

“Don’t you have anything else to use!? An outstanding sword, but such a heavy weapon can’t keep up with my attacks!”

Just like how he broke the sword moments ago, Gilbert unleashed high speed thrusts.

At this moment, Baltasar who was on the ground shouted:

“Don’t swing! Push it back!”

"!!"

Altina nodded.

When facing the enemy’s thrusting attack, she shouldn’t swing her sword— and should block with the blade.

After blocking the attack, push the enemy back with her sword.

With the hilt she was holding as the pivot, the sword blade and hilt spun in place with a simple twist.

The blade might be huge, but it could be moved in a large arc.

She deflected Gilbert's attack.

"You actually…!?"

The flurry of attacks stopped.

Even Altina who counterattacked was stunned.

"Ah… I see… By moving the hilt a little, the blade will move a lot. I always thought the blade was too heavy before the repairs, which affected the wielding of the sword."

"Ughh… It's not over yet!"

Gilbert launch his consecutive attacks again.

Altina moved in to restrain him, wiping away the enemy's trident attack by moving her hilt a little.

Instead of a sword technique, this was closer to using an oar.

If Gilbert had a weapon that could withstand the might of this sword, he might opt for another way to fight.

But he probably had never encountered someone like this before—an opponent who could fight toe to toe with the Mercenary King's trident with a sword.

Altina didn't wield her sword wildly like before, fighting in a way that was hard to preempt and pressuring her opponent.

Numerous cracks appeared on Gilbert's trident.

At the same time, the fight with the mercenary group 'Renard Pendu' was quieting down.

No matter how much one person excelled in combat, their weapons and stamina won't be able to last in the face of enemies outnumbering them by tens of folds.

Because of the fatigue and their weapons breaking, they were defeated and subdued one after another.

Even the Mercenary King couldn't avoid the accumulation of fatigue, and his movement was obviously turning dull.

Gilbert raised his trident high.

"For their sake, I can't lose! Hyaaa—!!"

"To change the Empire, I must win! Haaaahh—!!"

The weapons clashed, and Altina swung her sword.

Throwing up a gust of wind.

Blowing away the grass on the ground.

The silvery white blade glittered, and the bloodied trident head—

Shattered.

After losing his weapon, the walls of soldiers behind him positioned their pikes inches away from his body.

Gilbert was adamant in following his beliefs, refusing to fall at a time like this. He closed his eyes while standing still.

The troops erupted in cheers.

The joyous mood spread like wildfire.

What they wanted was a leader who brought them victory.

Voices praising the Empire and the Princess echoed through the hills.

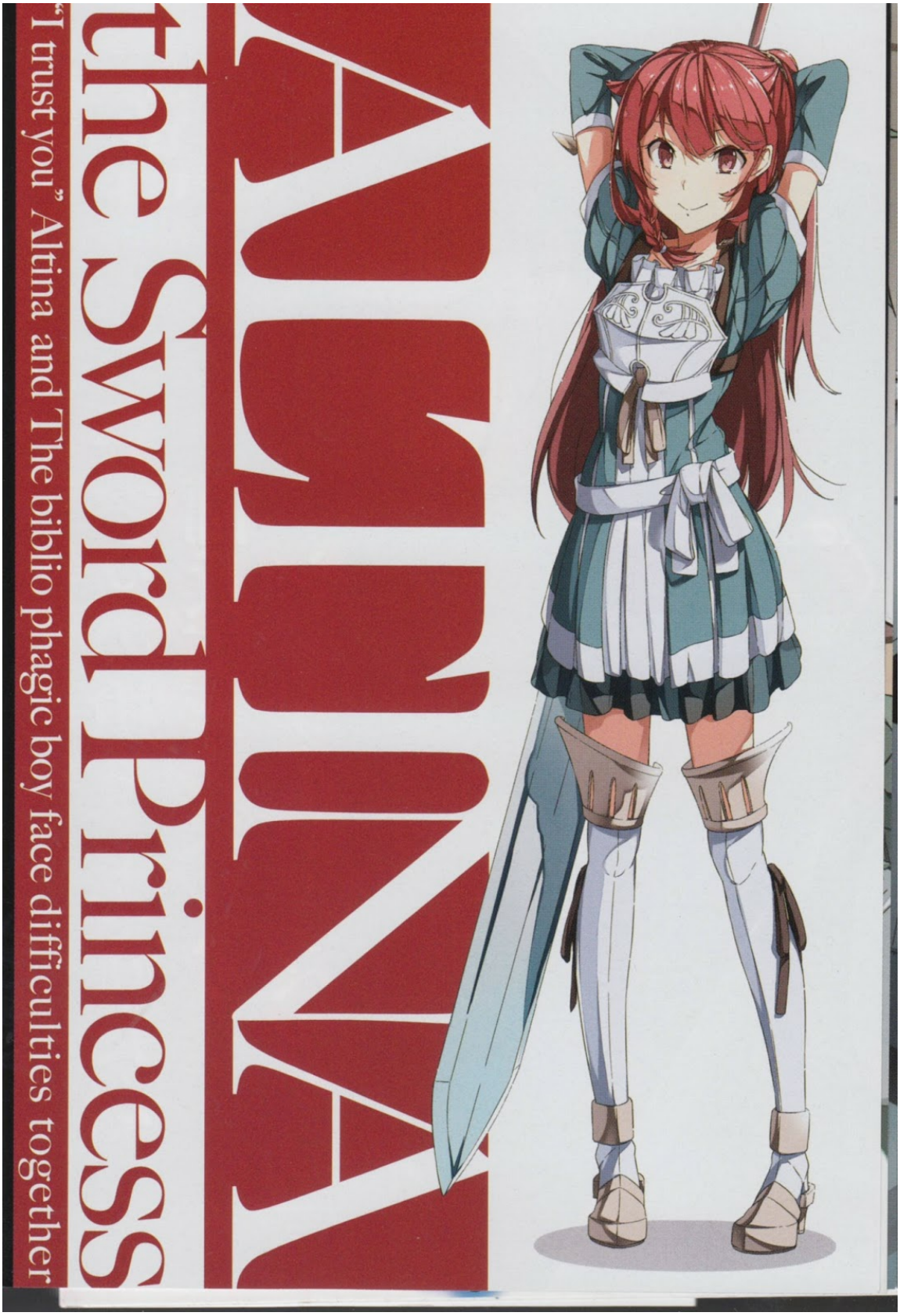
Regis sighed in relief.

Looking from afar, the sun had finally pierced through the fog, and the weather on the hills gradually became clear.

"… The fog is gone."

And the wind blew over.

Chapter 4 - Passing of the Emperor



Imperial Year 851, 6th June, Morning—

The vanguard of the High Britannia army approached Fort Bonaire.

Latreille watched over the entire battlefield from the watch tower.

But he couldn't grasp the situation of the entire battle.

Even though he was gradually recovering and could live his life normally now, he had visited the watchtower countless times.

In order to not let his staff officers and soldiers notice about his deteriorating eyesight, he had put in a lot of effort.

Germain analyzed what he could discern from the given information and said:

"Ah, Your Highness, the enemy pushed out about 30 cannons. Their damage would be trivial if fired from such a distance, are they starting to panic?"

"Maybe."

"Shield bearing soldiers blocked the front, with riflemen behind them… There are about 2,000 of men in this formation… This was the same tactic they used to defeat the Seventh Army. It would be hard to break through if we assault from the front."

"Hmm."

Latreille made a show of having considered this fact and nodded. In actual fact, he was visualizing the actual scene from these words.

Germain explained the situation as he added in his conjunctions as a strategist, pretending to be conversing with Latreille in earnest.

When Latreille asked him anything, he wouldn't answer directly.

"... What do you think about the movement of the enemy main forces?"

"Although the vanguard of the enemy moved, they were supported immediately by the shield and rifle formation. No signs of it being an all out attack… They are hesitant about risking their main forces, how half hearted."

The commander of the High Britannian forces was Oswald.

A man who uses unorthodox tactics as if they were the norm.

But, he could tell that the enemy lacked battle experience. High Britannia seldom fought wars with other nations, and news of civil war was almost unheard of.

— *Despicable venomous snake, it's the Empire's turn to strike back.*

Latreille made his decision.

"Deploy the 20,000 men outside the fort on the right wing. Then open the southern fort gate. Make them think we are going to attack. But that is a feint, so stay out of the range of their rifles. The cavalry would be the main forces and exit by the north gate behind us. They are to charge the left wing of the enemy's vanguard. Their defences would be weak if they need to deal with enemies from three sides."

"Understood!"

Even then, they will still suffer some losses—

But if they don't act, the walls of the fort might fall under lethal bombardment.

Bonaire didn't have many cannons.

If they engage in a shootout, there was a high chance the enemy would crush them.

Even if they could take out the thirty cannons, it would be difficult to fight a defensive siege battle if the walls were broken.

It wasn't a bad idea to trade the cavalry for the enemy's thirty cannons.

Latreille looked again.

But he still couldn't see it.

He was hoping for a messenger from the west.

If the Fourth Army led by Argentina defeated the enemy's supply unit —

"They are still not here."

Realizing the meaning behind Latreille's gaze, Germain said with a sigh:

"If they can cut off the supplies… If only there were some other ways to fight…"

"It is common to focus on defending. It will keep the morale up. The enemy might withdraw if we keep this up."

"They wouldn't be that retarded and only retreat after exhausting their ammunition."

"They might pretend to run out of supply and retreat."

"Impossible. If the troops in their units didn't know the truth, there would be deserters. With an army of 20,000, information would leak easily."

Latreille closed his eyes for a moment.

Germain said softly:

"… But, can they win?"

"I heard they won the naval battle."

A messenger already reported about the defeat of the 'Queen's Navy'.

But the main problem is that the supply unit led by the Mercenary King had already set off from Chaineboule city.

— The battle between the Fourth Imperial Army and the Mercenary King should have ended by now.

But it would take two days for a swift horse to travel from Lafressange to Fort Bonaire.

Germain sighed softly.

“If the Fourth Army loses to the Mercenary King…”

“Then we have to take the initiative. If we insist on staying put, our chances of winning would be abysmal if the Mercenary King’s supply unit links up with the High Britannia Army. We will need to defeat the 20,000 men commanded by Oswald, then crush the Mercenary King’s supply unit.”

“Is there really no other way?”

“Yes.”

Latreille sighed in his heart.

He could imagine how difficult it was just by thinking about it.

If he had one more month, he would be able to gather forces from the entire Empire. He would be able to field a huge army then. He just needs to leave behind enough forces to hold the line for the other fronts. But it was very likely the other cities would have fallen to the other nations…

— *Can the Princess really defeat the Mercenary King?*

This was the question the soldiers of the First Imperial Army were most concerned about.

Most of the troops would probably think ‘it’s too difficult’.

Starting from this thought, other doubts would spring forth.

— *If that happens and the High Britannian supply units arrives, what plans does Prince Latreille have?*

The First Imperial Army had never lost, even if they suffered an ambush, it wasn’t really a failure.

They could win this time too.

Contrary to this optimistic thinking— The heavy casualties suffered by the White Wolves Knights, and the consecutive defeat of the Second and Seventh Army gave rise to the pessimistic thinking that their chances of winning aren’t really good.

The neighing of the horses interrupted Latreille’s thoughts.

Germain pointed with his finger.

“The White Hare Knights are charging from the right wing!”

“Hmm.”

The First Imperial Army has three Knights Corps, with the White Hares known for their speed.

“The cavalry from the Seventh Army has launched an attack from the front!”

The knights commanded by 2nd Grade Combat Officer Coignieres numbered less than fifty. The Seventh Army had a small cavalry even before they suffered catastrophic losses.

But it would be the enemy to grasp the actual numbers from their position at the bottom of the valley.

Riflemen stood behind the cavalry.

They couldn’t ignore this.

According to the tactics—

The enemy's vanguard shield and rifle soldiers started splitting to the left and right.

With the thunderous sound of horse hooves, the White Hare Knights on the right wing advanced. They kept their distance and fired shots to intimidate the enemy.

The Seventh army braced their lances, acting as if they were going to launch a cavalry charge.

A moment later, another cavalry unit charged out from the left wing.

It was the Sun Knights of the Third Army, led by Lieutenant General Buxlow.

As swift as the wind, they charged into the vanguard of the enemy. Gunshots sounded out in retaliation of the attack.

They remained steadfast even though the riders fell one after another.

As expandable as an arrow that was fired.

The soldiers around Latreille started cheering.

Germaine sighed.

“Even though they have just 2,000 men, many riders of the third army were shot down in no time… As expected, charging at the enemy formation with cavalry would result in tremendous losses.”

“Yes.”

Right now, Latreille only has 4,000 cavalries under him.

In the past, this was a number that could easily overrun the enemy, no matter how large the enemy forces were.

But now, they will lose most of their cavalry if they launch a frontal assault… If that happens, they would be hard press to field an adequate number of cavalry to secure the Empire’s defences.

It wasn’t a simple matter of winning at any cost.

“No matter what, the plan still worked, Your Highness.”

“This is just a small victory.”

“Yes. But for our army that is covered by the shroud of pessimism, this victory will greatly encourage our officers and men.

As if they were proving the words uttered by Germain, the soldiers around them cheered.

He saw from his blurry vision that the formation of the enemy vanguard was crumbling.

Latreille rubbed his eyes.

“Eh…?”

“Ah, the enemy is retreating… Or rather, they are running away! This is undoubtedly the victory of General Buxlow’s Sun Knights! The

enemy started fleeing disorderly when they realized they couldn't win!"

"Do not pursue. Be on guard of long distance artillery attacks."

"Yes Sir!"

Flags were waved to issue the order.

Although the knights were tempted to earn merits, they were worried about some things too—

Buxlow stopped the Sun Knights from attacking, to avoid getting too near to the main base of the enemy.

At the same time, units were assigned to carry the cannons and ammunition left behind by the enemy.

The soldiers cheered again.

Germain said excitedly:

"Your Highness! Seems like General Buxlow captured the enemy cannons! If we place the cannons on top of our fort, the enemy won't be able to come near us!"

"... True."

"Hmmm? What is the matter?"

"Nothing… They couldn't handle the assault of the cavalry because their forces were dispersed… And they ran away without even firing the cannons… This can't be helped."

But in Latreille's mind, the enemy commander Oswald was a man like a venomous snake.

If the opponent was such a cunning man, there must be some kind of trap.

Germain tilted his head.

"Maybe they hid an explosive trap inside?"

"... Is that really so?"

“Let’s pull those cannons back into the fort, we will investigate it thoroughly then.”

“Alright.”

No matter what, the explosives weren’t dangerous without any fire.

The Imperial Army handles cannons on a regular basis too, so they wouldn’t fall for such simple traps.

While they were retreating, the enemy main base continued firing, which increased the casualties of the allied forces transporting the cannons…

But this should be the greatest victory.

In order to receive the new model cannons from the High Britannians — 41 Elswick cannons, a lot of soldiers gathered at the main gate.

The welcome was thunderous.

They showered Lieutenant General Buxlow and the Sun Knights with compliments.

At this moment, the White Hare Knights and the Seventh Cavalry had already withdrawn.

If the captured cannons could be put to good use, the war will turn in their favour.

The soldiers were transporting the cannons and the gunpowder through the main gate.

When suddenly— Horns to signal a charge sounded out.

It came from the High Britannian base camp.

Just what did that mean?

It wasn’t a charge, the enemy formation didn’t change. No movement in the enemy base too, but the horn kept sounding.

Germain tilted his head.

“N-Nothing is happening. Just what in the world is that horn—”

His vision was suddenly covered by light.

Sound of explosion!

The soldiers standing in the vicinity were thrown off their feet by the sudden impact.

Germain also fell onto the ground.

“Wahh!?”

“Ugghhh…”

Latreille held onto to the wall and didn’t fall, but the bright flash hurt his eyes a lot. He pressed on his eyes hard and massaged them.

His ears felt strange too.

He couldn’t hear anything for the moment.

What in the world happened...

“— Your Highness!

“Huh?”

“Prince Latreille!”

“... Germain? Are you okay?”

“Y-Yes! I am alright! I felt a violent bump to my waist, and my eyes and ears hurt.”

Those near the windows were hurt more badly.

A lot of people were moaning too.

Latreille gradually recovered his hearing. If he went deaf now, everything would be over.

“What the hell happened?”

Latreille asked. Germain propped himself up to the windows of the tower and looked out.

“Eh!? Prince Latreille— T-The main gate… is destroyed!”

“What did you say? I don’t get you, Germain.”

“It looked like it had been hit by multiple shells… The main gate has been reduced to rubbles! The gathered soldiers… and the Sun Knights are gone! There’s thick smoke over there, I can’t see anyone who is alive!”

He screamed.

Latreille was on the verge of despair.

But he collected himself and analyzed.

“... So… It was a trap after all.”

“What!?”

“I don’t know the details… But that horn was the key to the gunpowder we captured exploding.”

“The horn!?”

“This might sound terrible… But there might be someone hiding inside the barrels of gunpowder.”

“What! To actually do such a thing…”

— The one who lit the fire would be blown into bits.

When he thought about this, he couldn’t say anything more.

Even the Imperials understood the need to complete missions even at the expense of their own lives.

Maybe it was loyalty.

Or love for their family.

Or religious faith.

The reasons differed, but the mission was more important than their own lives sometimes.

Latreille gritted his teeth.

“They played us like a fiddle… Allowing us to capture their cannons and gunpowder so easily, and exploding the gunpowder with the horn as a signal.”

“This is an extraordinary scheme.”

There were commanders who ordered their soldiers to breakthrough an encirclement even if it kills them, there were also commanders who executed the subordinates who failed. There were even those who ordered shooting indiscriminately into a chaotic battle without regards to friend or foe.

But a commander who ordered a mission where the subordinate has to die to complete his duty was a first for Latreille.

He closed his eyes.

Wrath, regret, fear…

After suppressing these emotions, he thought and analyzed the situation calmly.

If he was shaken too, the army would definitely be defeated.

Latreille opened his eyes and looked towards the enemy.

The smoke has cleared.

Hordes of enemy soldiers gathered at the bottom of the hill, and were advancing slowly.

“A charge… Not really. Were they confident of victory? No, they should be wary of us. They don’t know how heavy our losses are yet.”

“I see.”

Germain nodded.

Latreille turned his back on the window.

“... I might be second rate as a strategist… But I don’t want to lose to anyone as a knight! Anyone who can still stand, pick up your pikes! Those who can still move, continue to fight! We will show

them the pride of the Belgarian Army!”

“Taking the field! His Highness Latreille is taking the field!”

The soldiers whose faces had turned green stood up with pikes in their hands.

“Ohh, His Highness!”

“Now is the time to show our valor!”

“Let the High Britannians see our might!”

News that Latreille was taking the field spread within the fort.

The soldiers who made their resolve with death picked up their weapons, mounted their warhorses and mustered.

Only 13,000 troops gathered before the rubbles of the main gate.

They lost nearly 7,000 men during the engagement with the enemy vanguard, and the explosion earlier.

The enemy only lost 30 cannons in exchange for the 7,000 men and the destruction of the main gate.

Latreille once again realized he was not suited for strategizing.

In the battle of wits and lies, his adversary was much better than him.

With the main gate lost, they couldn’t defend the fort any more.

Latreille drew his sword, mounted his horse and looked over his troops.

Everyone had the conviction to fight this battle with their backs to the wall.

Because they knew that this battle would decide the survival of the Empire.

There were still 20,000 soldiers outside the fort.

An army of 30,000.

There was no telling if it was enough to achieve victory in a head on battle…

Latreille raised his sword high. This was the sword of the ‘L’Empereur Flamme’, made from tristei, ‘Arme Victoire Volonte’. The straight blade with a silver shine was filled with the belief that their forces would emerge victorious.

He shouted:

“All units of the Belgarian Army! Follow me to battle!”

He charged on his horse.

In no time, he leapt onto the mountain of rubbles, and charged towards the enemy.

Germain followed right behind.

Coignieres from the Seventh Army and the other staff officers rushed bravely to the front.

All the soldiers put their best foot forward.

With the commanders leading the way, who would dare to tally?

Latreille was thankful to their courage and loyalty from the bottom of his heart.

He prepared to charge down from the rubble, and make a dangerous assault.

At this moment—

The High Britannians Army withdrew.

“The enemy is retreating!”

When he heard what Germain said, Latreille pulled on his reigns.

“What happened…?”

“Prince Latreille, it’s a messenger! He is holding the war banner of the Fourth Army!”

Coignieres pointed with a shout, and the troops started turning rowdy.

The messenger must bear news on how the battle between the Fourth Army and the supply unit turned out.

The High Britannians must have received the same news, and retreated from Fort Bonaire.

The soldiers who already had the resolve to fight to the death waited anxiously for news from the messenger.

It was delivered in no time— But on the way here, the warhorse he was riding on collapsed onto the ground with foam spewing from its mouth.

The messenger ran before Latreille and handed him an envelope sealed with wax.

“This!”

“Got it!”

Germain took the letter first. He undid the seal, opened the envelope — and confirmed the content.

He then closed one eye and gave the letter to Latreille. This was a code they decided earlier.

Latreille didn’t read the letter.

He will need to hold the letter really close to his face to read it… But he couldn’t let the troops realize that his eyesight was deteriorated.

So he pretended to read it.

He actually knew the content from the code earlier.

Latreille turned to his army and announced:

“Listen up! The Fourth Army have defeated the enemy supply unit!”

After shouting that, he shoved the letter back to Germain, as if he was saying that the rest was his job.

— In reality, it's because he couldn't see the content of the letter clearly.

Germain took the letter and started reading it out loud.

"The Fourth Imperial Army have defeated the High Britannian supply unit! And successfully captured their supplies. We have also taken in the Mercenary King Gilbert and his mercenaries as prisoners! We believe there won't be further enemy reinforcement! The 14,000 men of the Fourth Army will march for the capital on the noon of the 9th. The First Imperial Army doesn't need to rush and achieve merits, just concentrate on base defence! Message end! It's our victory, Prince Latreille!!"

The last part was screamed out loud, as if he was tearing his lungs out.

Latreille looked up into the sky.

And thrust his sword up.

Tears ran freely.

"Ohh, god… Long live the Belgarian Empire!!"

The cheers of the soldiers rang out.

Raising their pikes, waving their swords and knocking on their shields.

Soldiers clasping hands and hugging together cried tears of joy.

Latreille dismounted and sheathed his sword.

Then clasped Germain's hand tightly.

* * *

The same day, noon—

Latreille and Germain returned to the palace of Lu Valanu.

They had yet to clean away the dust of the battle field, dressed as they were during times of war.

The nobles frowned after seeing their disheveled state, and the maids shrieked softly too. But now wasn't the time to mind their appearance.

As they walked, Germain read out the intel gathered by the staff officers.

"— And made the above proposition."

"Hmm, since His Majesty already approved of this, gather the ministers to adjust the budget."

"Yes."

"Although we defeated the High Britannians, we also suffered heavy damage. If we don't rebuild the frontlines soon, we will lose territory just like Emperor Vicente."

The previous Emperor Vicente focused heavily on the arts, and made great contributions to cultural development. His ministers were chosen based on how elegant the poems they composed were, and generals would be dismissed if they couldn't understand the intrinsics of music. This resulted in the breakdown of the battlefront.

Belgaria lost a lot of territory, and the enemy were even threatening the capital.

The young Vicente died of illness.

There were all sorts of rumours behind his death. Some say he was assassinated by the military, but there was no way to discern the truth. But if he remained in power for just five more years, the Empire would probably fall.

In the aftermath, the current Emperor Liam took the throne.

He was very young then, General Corneille was appointed as Field Marshal and began constructing the battlefront, and gradually

recovered their lost territory.

And Corneille died on the battlefield…

The Empire then sanctified Vicente as an artist, and praised the soldier Corneille as the Field Marshal who saved the Empire.

Latreille respected both parties, and used them as negative examples to warn himself. Focusing too much on culture would lead to the destruction of the Empire, paying too little heed to civilization would make the citizens no different from wild beast.

He walked into the depths of the palace corridors.

Crazed music and uncultured laughter came from one of the rooms.

Reports from the frontlines had yet to reach the palace, so it couldn't be a victory celebration.

Germain furrowed his brows.

"Security is too lax, they wouldn't even know if the High Britannians were walking in this corridor."

"If this is a display of absolute confidence in the First Army, that isn't a bad thing."

"Even so, they shouldn't be partying here while the soldiers risk their lives out in the field."

He lowered his voice, but couldn't conceal his anger.

Latreille was thinking the same thing.

"… This needs to change, Germain. With our hands… In the near future, these bunch of sinecures will no longer have a place here. Only the meritorious will be qualified to be here."

"Yes!"

"It is about time… To resolve this."

"Is this about… the succession of the crown?"

"The figure of His Majesty was nowhere to be found during this war,

even after the First Army was deployed. The Belgarian Empire won't have a future if we don't fight on. If one doesn't have the will to do so, it is only right to abdicate."

Germain nodded.

After reporting the news of victory, he will enquire about that… Latreille made up his mind.

If they keep staying so listless, the situation of the Empire would worsen if he doesn't force the Emperor to abdicate.

If High Britannia worked in concert with the other nations, mass produced the new rifles and attacked with three or four times their numbers, Belgaria won't be able to prevail next time.

There was news that they had already formed an alliance with part of the Germanian Federation.

The crisis has reached a stage where the effort of the entire Empire would be needed to resolve this.

Latreille continued into the depths of the corridor, and met the imperial guard commander.

He probably didn't come out to welcome Latreille.

Did something happen?— Latreille thought and stopped.

The elderly imperial guard commander lowered his head respectfully.

"Isn't this Prince Latreille!? I heard of your brilliance on the battlefield, congratulations."

Because of the size of Belgaria, they had to fight long wars with enemy states. But the Empire had always been winning these skirmish.

Not just that…

It wasn't clear when it started, but it was now the norm to 'congratulate' whoever returned from the battlefield.

He lost a lot of his troops and his fort was nearly destroyed, there

was nothing worth ‘congratulating’!

Suppressing the wrath in his heart, Latreille saluted.

“Thank you for your kindness. May I visit the chambers of His Majesty?”

“My apologies, but His Majesty is sleeping right now.”

“Hmm?”

The Belgarian Empire didn’t have the custom of sleeping in the day.

“Is the Emperor not feeling well?”

“Thank you for your concern. The Emperor just needed some rest. Please come by later, My Prince… His Majesty just started his nap.”

“You want me to come by later because he couldn’t get up from bed?”

“It is unforgivable even for his own son to disrupt the rest of His Majesty.”

“I need to report the situation of the war, and discuss future plans with the Emperor.”

“That is very important. Wouldn’t it be better to do so after His Majesty wakes?”

The guard commander was stubborn.

No matter what, he refused to give in.

Latreille closed his eyes and muttered softly:

“… I can accept if it is in the middle of the night, but it’s daytime… For the ruler who has the fate of the Empire on his shoulders, he doesn’t even want to listen to updates about the war and discuss countermeasures when crisis is upon us?”

“Entry into His Majesty’s chambers is absolutely prohibited.”

— *If you want to sleep that much, you can sleep all you want after leading the soldiers personally on the field and achieving victory!*

While that white haired old man is sleeping in broad daylight, the Germanian Federation might be making new rifles while the High Britannians build new warships.

While they were at an impasse, five maids came from behind.

They held bottles and fruits.

And also napkins and flasks.

"... Wait."

Latreille's heavy voice surprised the maids.

"Y-Yes?"

"... What are these?"

"Eh? T-That… Chapoire Rouge, Year 772."

He heard this name before.

It was wine.

Latreille's voice sounded like that of a wild beast.

"... Why is someone who is feeling unwell sleeping and drinking wine?"

He couldn't take it anymore.

And entered, ignoring the guard commander.

Awed by Latreille's aura, the other party backed away.

Germain followed closely behind, with the heavy infantry guarding their backs closely.

After opening a large door, the colour of the carpet changed. It wasn't purely red in colour, but a myriad of deep and light shades of red.

Aside from guards and maids, only the Emperor and Royalty may enter this place.

Latreille said to Germain who stopped.

“It’s fine, follow me.”

“Ah… Yes.”

Lowering his head in a panic, Germain lifted his trembling legs and stepped onto the dark red carpet.

Latreille’s vision had recovered significantly.

Even so, he still couldn’t read documents. The content of letters would need to be summarized to him before he can read on.

Latreille ordered the heavy infantry to guard this place and not allow anyone in.

They saluted without a word.

The decorations along the corridor were extravagant, that’s how pieces of art were.

But the scent of wine and perfume triggered Latreille’s fury.

Suppressing his revolting urge, he headed for the depths of the palace.

The doors to the chambers were open.

Smell of wine and perfume lingered in the air. Or rather, their pungence stunk up the place.

Latreille spoke:

“Your Majesty, it’s me.”

Even Latreille thought his voice sounded dispirited.

Before hearing the response of the Emperor, a scream sounded out.

“Hyaa!?”

“… What is the matter, Latreille?”

A hoarse voice.

“Pardon me.”

He didn’t answer directly and entered the chambers.

In a situation like this, Germain could only stand outside in the corridor. He could hear the conversation inside, so he just needed to go in when the situation calls for it.

This wasn’t the first time Latreille visited the chambers of the Emperor.

When his father was confined to bed because of illness, he visited several times before.

The light near the window and the walls flickered quietly.

In the middle of the room was a large bed as huge as a gigantic carriage, with lace curtains draped over it.

On the table besides the bed were empty wine bottles lying on its side. Remnants of fruits were scattered over the floor.

Three individuals could be seen between the silky sheets.

The first was the sixth Concubine the Emperor recently married, Johaprecia Octovia.

She was just fifteen, but glimpses of her alluring body could be seen through the sheets.

There was one other person Latreille didn’t know.

The gender of the youth wasn’t clear, just like a child. The youth had a girly face and long hair, but the chest that wasn’t covered by the sheets was as flat as a boy. The skin was as smooth and beautiful as a carving.

It might be beautiful, but being in such a place was an ugly sight.

Between the two of them was the naked Emperor. His lower body was covered by the sheets.

His wrinkled skin looked scaly like a snake.

His muscles had diminished, leaving behind limbs with visible veins.

And his belly was bloated.

Turning his unfocused eyes towards Latreille, the mouth smeared with the lipstick of the Concubine opened.

“Since you have returned, that means we won the war correct?”

“… Yes.”

Latreille held back the urge to throw up and answered.

The Emperor said in a hoarse voice.

“Then there is no problem. I will leave the military to you like always.”

“…Is that all?”

“If you want a reward, just take anything you like from the treasury.”

“… It’s not about me… The Empire is facing a major crisis now. We fended off the invasion, but if we don’t want to suffer the humiliation because of the technological advances of the other nations, we have to come up with a countermeasure soon. Our coffers are running low, and wouldn’t be able to finance such a heavy expenditure.”

“Then just use what is necessary.”

At this moment, Johaprecia interrupted.

“Liam? Your decision is correct, but the palace in the south will still be built right?”

“Oh, I did promise that.”

“That’s right! We are looking forward to it!”

Latreille tilted his head.

“Palace?”

“During winter… This place is really cold.”

“Yes! Estaburg wouldn’t be that cold. If we go somewhere warmer, it will be good for Liam’s back pains too. I am really considerate for my husband, right!?”

The Emperor nodded and Johaprecia smiled. The young person of ambiguous gender smiled along with her.

Latreille felt his vision darken.

Were his eyes deteriorating again?

Or did the candle lights on the wall grew weaker?

“... Your Majesty… Building a palace in the south is… good. I am worried about your health. The south is a warm place, it would be great for you to rest there.”

“Yes, it’s settled then.”

“... Please leave the burden of being Emperor to me.”

Latreille blurted out like a child who just learned to speak.

Please abdicate.

His heart pounded.

Sweat soaked his back.

Will he incur the wrath of the Emperor if he asked for the throne so directly?

Despite his bountiful experience on the battlefield all this while, Latreille was shivering right now.

But the one who reacted was Johaprecia.

“Ahahahahah!”

Latreille was shocked and looked at her with eyes wide open.

Johaprecia hugged the Emperor’s neck lovingly, pressing her bountiful breasts onto him.

“That won’t do. Liam has to be the Emperor.”

“Yes.”

— *What is this woman saying?*

In Belgarian culture, women were not permitted to be a part of national matters.

Johaprecia looked at her stomach.

And laughed heartily.

“A new life will be born very soon. Liam is very energetic, I will bear the new child and he will be a true successor with vermillion hair and crimson eyes.”

The Emperor squinted his eyes, placing his wrinkled hand onto her belly.

“I’m counting on you.”

“Leave it to me! I am still young and beautiful. Look at how smooth my skin is! I can bear two or even three more children~~”

She pulled off the silky sheets as she said that.

Sweat glistened on her blushing skin.

Her white and tender skin emitted fatale allure. The sweat on her skin wetted the sheets, and even her breath was filled with lust.

Latreille lowered his head and squeezed out his words.

“… B-But… A newborn would be 15 years away from adulthood…”

Johaprecia got down from the bed.

Swaying her slender body, she approached Latreille.

“Fufufu…|”

“… What?”

Her pristine finger poked Latreille’s cheek.

With a sweet sigh, Johaprecia whispered:

“Fufu… Only my child can be the Emperor. Prince Latreille just needs to keep fighting on and on, and protect our nation.”

“… Tch!?”

Latreille was speechless.

He could only feel the sound of the wind.

That was the panting sound from Latreille’s throat.

This vile wench, she leeched off the Emperor, feasted on the coffers and now wants to swallow the entire Empire whole!?

A princess from a small eastern nation, not much different from a hostage…

But to think the palace summoned a terrible monster over.

The aging Emperor had fallen completely to this young witch and lost himself.

He even bedded someone with an ambiguous gender.

While the troops were fighting wars, these bunch were drinking in daylight and feasting on extravagant fruits, splurging the Empire away as if it was theirs to spend.

Latreille had an epiphany.

“… So the real enemy threatening the Empire… Is inside the palace.”

Hufufufu, Johaprecia laugh mockingly.

“Ara ara, how scary, where is the enemy~?”

This woman knew how to use her youth and feminine wiles to charm those in authority.

But how would a caged bird ever know the soul of the ferocious beast?

Latreille’s right hand reached out.

Without a sound.

In that hand was the sword, ‘Arme Victoire Volonte’—

Not even giving the witch the chance to scream, Latreille covered her bloodied mouth as his sharp blade pierced her heart.

Johaprecia rolled her eyes up, and kept spasming in Latrielle’s arms until she finally stopped moving.

Slowly— she turned limp.

Latreille drew out his sword, and flung her to the ground like a doll.

A colour bloodier and a deeper shade of red than the carpet splattered all over.

The face of the Emperor turned pale.

“Wo, Wo, Woooo…”

He made strange noises as his tears flowed.

The youth who was showing a fake smile on the bed was moments from screaming

A dagger flew from behind Latreille.

With a thud, it buried itself deep in the youth’s throat. The youth of ambiguous gender would never utter a sound again.

The one who threw the dagger was Germain.

He flicked back his silvery hair that seemed dishevelled because of a huge failure, and looked at Latreille.

“Is this fine!?”

“What crime is there in killing a monster that is building its nest in the Empire?”

“Y-Yes…”

The Emperor got down from the bed and held Johaprecia’s corpse.

“Ohhhhh…”

This wasn’t within Latreille’s expectation.

“… So father can fall in love just like a normal person.”

“Blood…”

“What?”

“The bloodline of L’Empereur Flamme… The boy who is going to succeed the throne is about to be born…”

“Ahhh…”

Until the very end, this man was bound by the curse of crimson hair

and eyes, a pitiful fellow who couldn't see beyond that. He didn't amount to anything, and wouldn't shower anyone with love.

He merely had the blood of the founding emperor in his veins.

Latreille spitted.

"Even if this evil wench gives birth to a boy with red hair and eyes… He would just be a bastard of a monster, and won't be a hero that will lead the Empire to prosperity!"

The Emperor looked up with bloodshot eyes.

This was probably the first time he conversed so honestly with his father.

He said while trembling:

"Latreille…"

"Yes."

"Why are you born with blonde hair?"

"... True… I was once consumed by hatred over this, cursed my mother, and even thought of burning all my hair off… But now, I am thankful. If I was born with red hair, I probably would be trapped in this curse, just like you, father. Because I am the second son, and didn't have red hair, I worked hard, expanded my horizons and built up my confidence."

"Curse…?"

"Father, your mindset that only those with red hair and eyes are worthy makes you a shallow and pitiful man. Let me liberate you from this."

"Ahh, Latreille…"

"Yes."

"... You… Just like how Corneille killed my uncle, will you kill me too?"

As expected, the previous Emperor Vicente was assassinated by Corneille. And this man seemed to be aware of the truth.

Liam said pitifully:

"... Latreille… Do you know? Corneille killed the previous Emperor from behind."

"I will remember that, Father."

Latreille used his sword… and pierced through the heart of the Emperor.

He relaxed his shoulders.

He only killed two people, but he couldn't breathe.

Germain asked uneasily:

"A-Are you okay, Your Highness?"

"... Phew… With the Emperor gone… I am like an eagle that broke free of my chains, and can fly freely in the sky… But right now, my body feels as heavy as lead."

"I'm relieved."

"Why?"

"Those who kill their father with their own hands will become no different from monsters if they can't take the burden on their conscience."

"... That's, true."

"But for the future of the Empire… Prince Latreille, please brave on no matter what sins you have to shoulder. I will do what I can to assist you."

"Germain… My deepest thanks."

Their eyes met.

And they smiled.

“Call in the men to cover up the scene. We need the palace physician to make a false report. In the end, it is great that there are no injuries on the face of the Emperor.”

“You managed to keep your calm about this.”

No, judging from the blood stained room, I’m not calm at all— Latreille mocked himself.

Germain smiled confidently.

“Please be at ease. I thought this might happen, and already bribed the maids. The stained beddings, carpets, and drapes could be disposed of and replaced in no time.”

“You actually…!?”

“Well, I am following the example of that strategist… this is one of several measures that I prepared.”

“Fufu… I see.”

“The guard commander would probably suspect that the Emperor was assassinated. What should we do?”

“That person is someone who turns with the wind. He will stand on our side if you offer him good terms. If he proves to be trouble, kill him.”

“Yes, the guards that don’t take bribes would be assigned to other places. We will disguise it as an accident and…”

“I will leave it to you.”

Germain lowered his head respectfully, then looked towards Latreille.

“Your Highness, this is the beginning.”

“Ahh… Now is just the beginning.”

To the creation of a new Empire.

He held his sword up and wiped away the bloodstain.

If he only cares about those who have passed on, he wouldn’t be able to pave a path to the future.

Imperial Year 851, 6th June.

It was a bright and sunny day in the morning, but dark clouds loomed suddenly and heavy rain fell.

Shocking news stunned the entire capital.

The Emperor had died.

Wiping away the joy of beating back the High Britannian Army, this news hung heavily.

And the sixth Concubine Johaprecia Octovia committed suicide to be with her husband.

The capital was covered in the solemn atmosphere of mourning the many dead soldiers, the passing of the Emperor and the death of the Concubine.

The next day, 7th June, amidst the torrent of chaos—

The Second Prince Allen Deux Latreille announced his succession as the new Emperor.

Credits

Author	—	(むらさき ゆきや) Yukiya Murasaki
Illustrator	—	himesuz
Translators	—	Skythewood
Editors	—	AMetroid Darkdhaos Ice Phantom MythosIX Rockgollem Teddy Miao Gingery Klaus
Book designer	—	Armaell

アルティー十第7巻
読んでくださって
ありがとうございます!!
今回はクラリスさん分が
ひかえめでしたので
クラリスさんを描きました。
むらさきさん、担当の和田さん、
今回もとても楽しんで
読ませていただきました。
ありがとうございます。